Stourbridge
CHRONICLE

Thursday, January 25, 2018 | Read by more than 56,000 people | Price when sold 70p

Road congestion outside school to be investigated

POOR PARKING A THREAT TO PUPILS

Report by Clare Butler

ACTION is being taken over fears that motorists parking on double yellow lines and kerbs outside a school are putting children at risk.

Parents say cars pulling up outside Ham Dingle Primary School, in Old Ham Lane, Stourbridge, are parking 'dangerously' and pose a risk to the safety of pedestrians.

Dudley Council bosses say its enforcement team will now 'investigate further'. Councillor Ian Kettle, who represents Pedmore and Stourbridge East ward, said that the problem had been ongoing for years.

Councillor Ian Kettle

He said: "Neighbours have complained, drivers have been threatened with action but still nothing changes.

"It wouldn't matter if they left after a couple of minutes, but they are parking up for around an hour.

"The lane has some bends in it and these drivers end up jamming it up. It is quite dangerous.

"The problem is that we have built so many of our schools on awkward little lanes or on main roads."

Inconsiderate

Pictures posted on social media showed cars parked on kerbs, double yellow lines and fully on the pavement surrounding the school during peak times.

Sarah Dunbar-Baker took to Twitter saying: "This is the parking at 3.20pm close to Ham Dingle School Pedmore. Inconsiderate drivers parking dangerously without considering access and safety of children and pedestrians. There was even parking on double yellow lines!"

Dudley Council Plus said it has been reported to the parking management team,which would be sending an enforcement team to investigate.

TOWN'S HISTORIC CHURCH RESTORED TO GLORY

Rev Andrew Sillis has welcomed the much-needed refurbishment work at the 18th century St Thomas's Church in Stourbridge

RESTORATION work is complete at St Thomas's Church in Stourbridge, after the scheme received £208,000 in grants.

Clergy and the congregation at the Grade I listed church are celebrating the success of the restoration project which attracted funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, National Churches Trust, All Churches Trust, The Garfield Weston Foundation and St Thomas' Parochial Church Council and volunteers.

The work follows an inspection in 2012 when experts spotted that some parts of the building's stone slabs were crumbling, meaning they were in a dangerous condition and requiring urgent attention.

Reverend Andrew Sillis, the priest in charge of St Thomas's thanked everyone involved for their support.

Project co-ordinator Wendy Hemming said: "We have put in a toilet and an accessible ramp, we also have trained tour guides."

The Church of England building was erected between 1728 and 1736 by public subscription.

COURT

Third man faces murder charge

A THIRD man has been charged with murdering a father at a flat above a convenience store in Dudley.

Jaskaran Kang, aged 24, from Handsworth, was stabbed to death at the property in Stourbridge Road on January 6.

Dontay Ellis, 18, of Central Drive, Lower Gornal, appeared at Dudley Magistrates Court. Reggie Salmon, 20, of Stourbridge Road, Dudley, together with a 17-year-old boy from Newcastle-Under-Lyme, who cannot be named for legal reasons, have already been charged over Mr Kang's death.

All three were remanded in custody.

DEVELOPMENT

Store and flats plan for 'eyesore' site

PLANS have been submitted to build a supermarket and eight flats in a conservation area in Brierley Hill.

The three-storey development and parking has been earmarked for land on Moor Street and Albion Street, under a planning application from Rizwan Hyder submitted to Dudley Council. The applicant said the development would brings jobs and improve an eyesore site.

ACCIDENT

Lorry ploughs into the side of a house

A LORRY driver was in a serious condition after smashing into the side of a house in Halesowen on Monday. Crews were called to the junction of Carters Lane and Royal Oak Road shortly after 9.45am where a lorry was found to have crashed into the side of a home, knocking down a brick garden wall. No-one in the property was injured. Paramedics found the driver in cardiac arrest.

INSIDE

CHLOE'S CURLS BY TOP STYLIST

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Hawthorns to host service for Cyrille

FUNERAL details and a celebratory service have been announced for Black Country football legend Cyrille Regis.

The star's private family funeral will be held on Tuesday, January 30.

West Bromwich Albion have confirmed The Hawthorns will stage a service to honour Cyrille's life immediately after the funeral. The club said this event will be 'a celebration of his life and career'. It will allow Cyrille's fans to join his family at the stadium.

The service for the Albion, Wolves, Coventry and Villa star will be held in the East Stand. It will be conducted from 11am by Pastor David Carr from the church Cyrille attended, the Renewal Christian Centre in Solihull.

There will be seats for supporters and the public who want to pay their respects to one of the Baggies' all-time greats. The club will announce details of how fans can attend, see their website for details. Otherwise, supporters will have a chance to say their farewells earlier in the day, as Cyrille's funeral cortege will leave The Hawthorns at 8.45am. The club are making plans to accommodate fans who want to salute Cyrille, who died last wweek aged 59, before the cortege leaves for the private service.

Albion have also confirmed the impromptu 'shrine' at the Astle Gates will remain in place until after the next Premier League home game, against Southampton, for which the club is planning a major tribute to its former England striker.

In a further mark of respect, the stadium flags at The Hawthorns will remain at half-mast until after his funeral. A club statement said: "Julia and Cyrille's children Robert and Michelle have once again asked us to convey the family's huge appreciation for the messages of love and support which continue to flood in from Albion fans and the wider football community."

Colleagues and friends who want to attend the service should email rob.doyle@stellargroup.co.uk

Domestic abuse crime reports up by a fifth

THE number of domestic abuse crimes in the West Midlands rose by almost a fifth in one year, according to a council report.

There were 1,236 domestic abuse crimes between April 1 and September 30 last year – up from 1,061 in the same period in 2016.

A Dudley Council report said the 16 per cent increase in recorded domestic abuse crimes should not 'be viewed negatively' as it means more people are reporting incidents.

However, a Black Country campaigner has disagreed, and said education is key to tackling domestic abuse.

The report for the council's scrutiny committee said: "From April 1, 2017 to September 30, 2017 1,236 domestic abuse crimes have been recorded by West Midlands Police. This compares to 1,061 for the same period in 2016, therefore an increase of 175 recorded crimes.

Awareness

"An increase in recorded crimes is not viewed negatively as a number of campaigns have taken place to increase to raise awareness in respect of domestic violence and abuse, and to encourage reporting."

Samantha Billingham, who runs the Survivors of Domestic Abuse campaign (SODA) in the Black Country, said: "I'm not really sure why there is an increase – there are lots of different reasons why it could be high.

"I would view that as negative definitely and I think something needs to be done early in life. It is all about education."

Samantha, from Brierley Hill, was last week named winner of the Fresh Start award in the Express & Star's Great Big Thank You Awards.

Scrutiny committee member Councillor Karen Jordan added: "I am pleased that people are coming forward and getting help, but on the other hand I am so disappointed that domestic violence is still going on."

Stylist Lee is a cut above the rest

Celebrity hairdresse Lee Stafford works his magic on student Chloe Millard, 18, from Wordsley

HAIR we go! Celebrity hairdresser Lee Stafford visited a college to pass on his skills to hairdressing students during a special masterclass.

Fifty students took part in the event at Halesowen College where Lee re-styled the hair of Chloe Millard, from Wordsley.

Mr Stafford showed off the twisted-tong technique, which he said took long straight hair and gave it a 'Kate Moss/Sienna Miller look'.

The students then had the chance to see advanced hairdressing skills and ask Mr Stafford a range of questions.

The former Hairdresser of the Year – and Men's Hairdresser of the Year – now has hair academies in nine further education colleges and products which sell in more than 40 countries worldwide.

Sharon Stanton, curriculum team manager for hair and beauty, said: "We were delighted to welcome Lee to Halesowen College.

"During his visit he spoke with students and passed on his skills and experience.

"It was very good of him to give up his time to do the demonstration pass on all his knowledge and expertise to our students."

Mr Stafford won the Men's British Hairdresser of the Year award in 1998 and opened his second salon in Soho, London, two years later.

He was then voted into This Morning's television show as one of their chosen elite stylists.

Crystal clear images help keep crime off the buses

POLICE have praised new CCTV cameras which help officers tackle anti-social behaviour on buses in the Black Country in real time.

Buses in the West Midlands have more CCTV cameras than any other mode of transport, according to National Express. This led a senior police officer to say he is 'staggered' anyone does anything wrong on a bus because the CCTV pictures are so clear.

Detective Inspector Warren Hines of West Midlands Police CID homicide investigation team praised the quality of the CCTV footage used in the case of a fatal stabbing on the number 11 bus in January last year. Kieran Gillespie, aged 26, from Wellesbourne Road, Handsworth, was jailed for life in July for the murder of Leon Barrett-Hazle.

Det Insp Hines said: "Without doubt, the quality of the CCTV footage from the bus solved this case for us. It left the offender no option but to hand himself in once those pictures were published."

National Express West Midlands has multiple CCTV cameras – up to 12 – on every one of its 1,600 buses.

All new buses since 2012 have been fitted with next-generation digital CCTV units which give crystal-clear pictures. West Midlands Safer Travel Partnership has also installed 4G Vemotion CCTV.

Venues to remain closed until 2020

THE Civic Halls in Wolverhampton will stay closed for two years with the major overhaul of the buildings to cost £23 million more than first thought.

It means events booked in for 2018, including the Grand Slam of Darts and top comedians such as Jason Manford and Sarah Millican will not now be held at the famous venues in Wolverhampton.

But while some shows, across the Civic Hall and Wulfrun Hall, may be cancelled council bosses promised the Grand Slam of Darts will be found another home in the city until at least 2020.

City council bosses said people with tickets would be contacted when the situation becomes clear.

Work to revamp the Civic Halls was was originally due to cost £14.4 million.

Greyhounds need to find new homes

THE Greyhound Trust has rehomed eight dogs so far this month. Deb Worton, manager at the Dudley-based charity, said: "It would certainly be wonderful if our remaining hounds could find a loving home before the end of the month." Call 07594 474 272.

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Jam-buster bid at island could have 2020 start

LONG-AWAITED plans to revamp a notoriously congested roundabout in the Black Country have finally taken a step forward.

But it could still be up to two years before any improvements get under way at busy Birchley Island.

Transport bosses are set to approve a funding bid to launch a scheme aimed at cutting congestion at the roundabout in Oldbury, which is beside junction two of the M5.

The Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) say it could be 2020 before any work starts.

Roads chiefs have called for action at the island for years due to the level of congestion faced by drivers on a daily basis.

The LEP said a project review was currently being carried out and when complete detailed designs for the project would follow. It said a 'start on site date' was 'anticipated before 2020'.

Board members are set to approve £150,000 to allow design work to progress but substantial funding for the project has so far proved to be a stumbling block.

Black Country LEP board member Ninder Johal said it was likely the group would wait for the outcome of a feasibility study and find out how much the scheme would cost before making a decision over whether to back it.

Town centre pub is now up for sale

AN historic Stourbridge pub which was told to tighten security after a customer was attacked has gone up for sale.

The Bell, on the corner of Bell Street and Market Street, is being sold through estate agent Andrew Taplin.

The pub is also a hotel and has shop units that are available to let.

Wollaston and Stourbridge town councillor Steve Clark said: "It is a beautiful old building. I know it has had its problems. Hopefully whoever takes over can refurbish the site and make it a big part of the town."

Dudley Council told bosses that security must be improved, after a man was left nursing serious injuries following an attack in October.

Museum's road

PLANS to build a new 1940s to 60s town at the Black Country Living Museum have moved a step forward after an application was submitted to Dudley Council for a new access road at the Tipton Road site.

Celebrity praises slimming club bosses

Pop star and TV celebrity Peter Andre with Julie Cooper, Tash Allmont, Nikki Brant, Claire Wier, Sue Dutton, Debbie Moule and Jane Smith at the ceremony

GROUPS of Slimming World consultants from Dudley and Kidderminster have been praised by singer Peter Andre for helping change lives.

The teams met up with the Australian-raised TV celebrity at the annual Slimming World Awards.

The Mysterious Girl singer cohosted the event with the organisation's founder and chairman Margaret Miles-Bramwell OBE. He highlighted the efforts of consultants from Dudley and Kidderminster.

Julie Cooper from the Kidderminster group said: "We couldn't be prouder of our members. It's so rewarding to see people being able to do things that they didn't think were possible before losing weight, whether that's having more energy, feeling happier, wearing smaller clothes, taking up new hobbies, reducing medication or doing more with their family and friends."

Laurie Griffin, who manages Slimming World groups in Dudley, said: "Cuddling up to Peter was a real treat. I'm heading into 2018 super motivated to support even more people in Dudley."

Duncan trail to celebrate borough's football hero

FOOTBALL fans can now go on a Dudley town trail devoted to England and Manchester United legend Duncan Edwards.

A leaflet has been relaunched by Dudley Council highlighting landmarks in the town linked to the Dudley-born footballer.

The leaflet will allow people to journey on a self-guided tour of landmarks. Highlights include the memorial plaque at his former home on the Priory Estate, the stained glass windows at St Francis Church which were dedicated to the player, a life-sized statue in the town centre, together with his final resting place

Duncan Edwards

Part of the famous 'Busby Babes' United, Edwards died on February 21, 1958, from injuries sustained in the Munich air disaster, when the aircraft bringing the team back from a match against Red Star Belgrade crashed at the German airport.

A total of 23 died including eight players alongside club officials, journalists, supporters and aircrew. Events will take place this year to mark the 60th anniversary.

Mayor of Dudley Councillor Dave Tyler said: "Duncan Edwards was an icon of a generation. With the 60th anniversary of the Munich air disaster, we thought it would be an opportune time to update and relaunch the leaflet.

"We are proud he was born and bred in Dudley borough and still maintain close ties with Manchester United. They have kindly leant us a number of his shirts for display at the new museum at the Archives, which is one of the stops on this tour. If you visit the archives before 30 March you will also be able to view the temporary exhibition dedicated to Dudley's sporting hero."

Copies of the leaflet are available at the museum, Dudley libraries, tourist attractions and online at discover.dudley.gov.uk website.

Dudley College student Gia Lawrence-Harish is a finalist in Top Model 2018, which is being held in London in April, after being chosen from thousands

Model student makes it to final

A TEENAGE photography student has reached he finals of a prestigious modelling competition.

Aspiring model 17-year-old Gia Lawrence-Harish was selected from thousands of other hopeful girls, all eager to make it to the finals of Top Model 2018.

The Dudley College student, who admitted she used to be teased at school, said being one of the few to be chosen had boosted her confidence.

Gia said: "I was really shocked to hear I had got through because I thought my nerves had got the better of me. I thought I would fall over. It's hard walking in heels normally let alone trying to be professional in them and strut my stuff."

The teenager from Wolverhampton has been modelling part time since she was 15. The Top Model 2018 Model Awards and Fashion Show will be held in London on April 6 and 7.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Principal quits ahead of report

THE headteacher of a Dudley secondary school has quit his post in advance of the release of a report by school inspectors.

Rob Hatch stood down as principal of Dudley's Holly Hall Academy last week.

The school says he decided to leave after inspectors from Ofsted had visited shortly before Christmas. His interim replacement has been named as Andy Landers, the school's vice-principal.

Jo Higgins, CEO of the trust, said: "Following the recent Ofsted inspection, Rob Hatch decided to leave the academy. The Dudley Academy Trust Board fully recognises Mr Hatch's contribution to the leadership of the school and wishes him every success for the future."

Grab your flat cap for Peaky nights

THE 1920s gangster world of Peaky Blinders is coming back to the Black Country Living Museum, following sell-out nights celebrating the Birmingham-based drama.

Fans of the hit TV show will be able to grab their flat cap or flapper dress to walk around the series' film set, as well as enjoying an evening of music and entertainment from the roaring 20s.

Revellers will be able to take a stroll around Shelby's yard – where many props used during the filming remain – at the adults-only event which takes place on September 7 and 8.

New boss takes over at NHS trust

A NEW chairman has been appointed at Dudley and Walsall Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust. Harry Turner, one of Dudley and Walsall NHS Trust's current non-executive directors and vice-chair, will step up to the top job from February 1. Ben Reid will be stepping down from the role at the end of this month to be chairman at The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospitals NHS Trust.

Chance to have say on conservation areas

RESIDENTS are invited to have their say on proposals to extend three conservation areas in Dudley borough.

In Sedgley the proposal is to extend the boundary of the conservation area to include parts of High Street, Bilston Street, Brick Street, Dudley Street, The Priory, High Holborn and Tipton Street. In Wollaston, The Wordsley Church conservation area also looks to extend Councillor Ian Kettle said: "We want to hear people's views on our proposals before February 19."

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COUNTY NEWS

Jeff Lynne's ELO in extra Brum date

JEFF Lynne's Electric Light Orchestra will play a third date in their home city of Birmingham.

The band, which formed in the West Midlands back in 1971, is best known for a huge array of hit songs including Mr Blue Sky, Living Thing, Evil Woman, Roll Over Beethoven and Don't Bring Me Down.

The group will now play Arena Birmingham on October 13, as well as October 10 and 12, which had been previously announced. From 1972 to 1986, ELO accumulated 20 top 20 hit singles in the UK chart.

For more information visit www.arenabham.co.uk Tickets start at £57.40.

Nova recruitment jobs are saved

A WEST Midland recruitment and training agency has been bought out of administration.

The sale of Nova Recruitment by Steven Stokes and Raj Mittal, partners with business advisory firm FRP Advisory, has secured the jobs of all 12 staff based at its Castle Street, Dudley, and Birmingham premises. It has been bought by Capital Outsourcing Group.

Nova Recruitment had expanded its range of services across a number of sectors as part of its steady growth since formation in 1980, with particular expertise in the industrial, retail and catering sectors.

Myths and legends from old Britain

MYTHS and legends of the British Isles will be the topic of an evening canalside talk in Stourbridge.

The Forgotten Tales combines storytelling, poetry and traditional folk songs and is being held at The Bonded Warehouse on March 3, performed by Parable Arts founder, John Buckeridge.

It starts at 7.30pm running through to 9pm at the Canal Street venue. Buy tickets from £7.50 online at theforgottentales.com website.

Midlands food awards nominations appeal

THE Midlands Food, Drink and Hospitality Awards is set to be the biggest ever, with Pepsi Max as headline sponsor again. It takes place at Edgbaston cricket stadium on June 25.

The awards will recognise and reward bars, restaurants, cafes and other food firms for first class service. Nominationsopen until April 23. Visit mfdhawards.co.uk to nominate.

Shamed family doctor is sent to prison

A DISGRACED family doctor who preyed on women patients at his surgery has been jailed for 12 years.

Shamed Dr Jaswant Rathore committed 10 sexual assaults on four women patients and was told by Judge Michael Challinor that his 32-year career had been turned into a 'complete shipwreck'.

The Indian-born GP attacked victims who had gone to his Castle Meadows Surgery in Milking Bank, Dudley, with everyday complaints as mundane as hayfever. The 60-year-old, from Wall Heath, delivered unnecessary massage treatment to patients to satisfy his own lust, Wolverhampton Crown Court heard during his trial.

Judge Challinor continued: "You used your standing in the community as a cloak behind which to carry out assaults on your patients for your personal gratification. By your actions you violated their faith in you."

Judge Challinor said the sexual assaults which occurred over a two and a half year period had been 'planned and sustained'.

Rathore, from Ploughman's Walk, insisted he had always acted professionally and, in each case, the touching during 'manipulative therapy' had been medically appropriate. He was found guilty of eight offences of sexual assault and two counts of assault by penetration, committed against four women patients. The jury acquitted him of charges alleging eight further sexual offences against four more women, none of whom can be identified.

Mr Alan Jenkins, defending said: "He will now be erased from the medical register and will never practise again." Rathore was made the subject of a sexual harm prevention order for 15 years and put on the sexual offenders register for life.

Disgraced GP 'could have abused others'

Report by Annabal Bagdi

IT was a 'horrific' breach of trust that saw shamed GP Jaswant Rathore attack four female patients in his surgery.

Police officers fear he may have assaulted even more women during his three decades at a Dudley practice.

The 60-year-old is starting a 12-year sentence after jurors convicted him of 10 sexual assaults.

Senior investigating officer Detective Inspector Michelle Thurgood said: "It was a horrific breach of a position of trust. This was somebody who was a trusted GP, respected in the community. Many of the patients had gone to him for many years, so absolutely trusted him.

"We go to our doctor when we're at our most vulnerable and he has abused that trust by carrying out those offences."

Rathore, of Ploughmans Walk, Wall Heath, denied 18 counts of sexual assault between November 28, 2008, and March 26, 2015.

Prosecutors alleged he attacked eight female patients, who cannot be named for legal reasons, after duping them into thinking he was treating their medical problems.

But he told police touching of the women was 'medically appropriate' and he had acted professionally during appointments with patients at Castle Meadows Surgery.

Following a seven-week trial at Wolverhampton Crown Court (see above), jurors found him guilty of 10 sexual assaults, committed during more than two-and-a-half years.

The jury acquitted him of eight further sexual offences allegedly committed against four other women.

DI Thurgood, of West Midlands Police's public protection unit, said she was concerned more victims could be suffering in silence but confirmed there were no plans to bring further prosecutions against Rathore.

She added: "He has been a GP for a long time, there could be other victims.

"What I would say is, if anybody who is reading the Press and they think that they are a victim, then please come forward.

"If you can find the strength to come forward, do so. You'll be given all the time and support you need to help you."

GP Jaswant Rathore has been jailed

The Castle Meadows surgery at Milking Bank, Dudley

Rathore's offending came to light when one of his victims spoke to police about her ordeal for the first time in May 2015. After gathering statements from victims, as well as securing medical and phone records, Rathore was charged in December in relation to three women.

DI Thurgood confirmed it was the first time Rathore had been prosecuted for sex offences, adding: "[May 2015] was the first report ever in relation to him.

Bravery

"Very quickly after her report, we had two further reports. We investigated the case against the three women. When he was charged, we put out a press release. That led to numerous phone calls and a further five women coming forward.

"The women have all shown extreme bravery in coming forward. The majority of them were extremely traumatised by what had happened to them.They couldn't quite believe what had happened to them."

The sex offender, who was supported throughout his trial by his wife and daughters, refused to answer any questions during police interview and instead offered prepared statements.

DI Thurgood said there was 'no interaction' from Rathore, adding: "In all his interviews, it was just prepared statements, he didn't comment.

"He was just very cold, he had obviously taken advice from his counsel, so didn't say anything."

During the trial, prosecutor Ms Heidi Kubik claimed Rathore assaulted the women to fuel his 'illicit sexual desire' while at the helm of the Milking Bank practice.

He told patients he needed to carry out the treatment to alleviate their pain but instead sexually assaulted them.

The prosecutor said patients trusted the family doctor, who had been at the surgery since 1986, when he advised them his medical examinations were necessary.

Senior Crown prosecutor Ian Pinkney, of West Midlands Crown Prosecution Service's complex casework unit, said: "Dr Jaswant Rathore abused his position of trust to carry out a series of sexual assaults against a number of his female patients.

"He preyed on women who contacted him for medical assistance, but rather than offer them help, he assaulted them for his own sexual gratification."

Council 'not ignoring' green belt concerns

COUNCIL officers have insisted they are listening to residents concerns over a review of green belt land after they were accused of 'ignoring' them.

Dudley Council is set to press ahead with the review, despite calls for it to be halted by those concerned about more development on the borough's rural fringe, particularly near Halesowen.

The green belt review follows a 10-week public consultation held by the council as part of the Black Country Core Strategy to plan up to 2036 and aims to address a 22,000 shortfall of homes across the region.

But councillors branded the public consultation – which focused on the shortfall of brownfield sites needed to accommodate the 78,000 homes required by 2036 – as not 'robust' enough at an overview and scrutiny committee meeting last week.

Urgent

Councillor Simon Phipps, who represents Belle Vue ward, said: "I personally feel the entire consultation of the Black Country Core Strategy has not been robust enough."

"I would also like to recommend that the board recommends cabinet request an urgent report on the issues and options consultation prior to approving any further work on the Black Country Core Strategy."

The consultation yielded 1,600 formal responses and 300 social media comments.

Speaking at the meeting was Gary Mills, a Halesowen resident, said he felt the process was going ahead 'without listening to the public consultation'.

But Alan Lunt, strategic director, said: "I can absolutely assure you that your comments and your observations during the consultation are not being ignored. They will be taken into account along with a great weight and wide range of evidence which we are obliged to collect and collate in order to ensure that we have a sound local plan. If we do not undertake a green belt review then the green belt is at greater risk."

Charter update

DUDLEY Council's plan to create a charter for dignity in care will be showcased at an event next week.

Dudley Centre for Inclusive Living and Disability in Action will update the public about how improvements to treatment will be made in Dudley.

The event will take place at Queens Cross Network, Wellington Road, Dudley, on Thursday, February 1. For more information call (01384) 813460.

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Health boss thanks staff for care and dedication

DIRECTORS were brought into a hospital's accident and emergency department to ensure it was being run safely amid unprecedented demand.

Nursing and medical directors oversaw the A&E at Russells Hall Hospital in Dudley as staff battled to cope with the 'huge demand'.

Staff have been praised for their efforts during the difficult period as the chief executive of the trust which runs the hospital, Diane Wake, admitted recent weeks had been challenging.

The hospital has struggled to cope with the numbers coming into A&E, like many other NHS hospitals during the winter crisis.

The national NHS target is that 95 per cent of patients should be seen within four hours. But only 83.9 per cent were seen within four hours in November, down from 90 per cent the previous month.

Ms Wake, boss of Dudley Group NHS Trust, said: "We have experienced huge demand for our emergency services, in particular the acutely unwell arriving by ambulance.

"The type of activity has caused challenges for us with patient flow and we continue to work with colleagues across the health and social care economy to provide the best care for our patients.

"I have been so impressed by the outstanding care, dedication and resilience I have seen and I hope it goes without saying how proud and grateful I am of each and every member of staff. I know some staff even gave up spare time during this busy period. Both the nursing and medical director have been onsite to oversee patient safety and quality standards are maintained."

Phoenix group to combat loneliness

A SOCIAL club for the widowed and divorced is on the look out for new members.

Phoenix Amblecote meets every Wednesday evening at the Amblecote Royal British Legion club in School Drive, Stourbridge.

Secretary Carol Key said it was a good way for single adults who had either separated from, or lost their partners, to meet new people and combat loneliness.

The group is a branch of the national organisation National Council for the Divorced, Separated & Widowed. Up to 100 people attend each session. Members pay £3 a week to take part, plus a £5 annual subscription. Email carol.key2@hotmail.com for details.

Sex game killer showed no remorse

Murderer Ashley Foster

KILLER Ashley Foster faces at least 26 years behind bars for murdering teenager Megan Bills in an act of 'evil cruelty beyond belief'.

The twisted 24-year-old was obsessed with deviant sex and confessed in a letter to his mother that the 17-year-old had been strangled during violent love-making. It came just hours after they met for the first time following his release from jail three days earlier after trying to stab one of his sisters.

He has been jailed for life for murdering Megan with a minimum term of 26 years.

Foster, whose two pleas to let him strangle a previous girlfriend during sex had been rejected, wrote: "We ended up having sex. She tells me she likes to be strangled, so I obliged. I strangled her and she loved it so much . . . but then as I released her, her eyes closed."

But he repeatedly refused to say exactly how Megan met her death in his room at the New Horizons hostel for ex-offenders in Highgate Road, Brierley Hill, on April 16 last year – and declined to give evidence at his Wolverhampton Crown Court trial. He admitted preventing her burial but denied manslaughter and murder.

He hid the body in a wardrobe that was wrapped in cling-film to speed up decomposition of the corpse. When the body was found almost three weeks later it was impossible to pinpoint the cause of death.

Detective Inspector Caroline Corfield said: "He never showed any remorse. His only concern was himself. He had an obsession with deviant sex and he disposed of Megan's young life to satisfy his own twisted desires."

Megan's adoptive parents Dawn and Martin Bills said: "This vile and tragic event has robbed us of so much. To have lost Megan and had her body concealed until it had rotted beyond recognition is painful beyond words, and demonstrates an evil cruelty beyond any decent comprehension."

Megan's 'dangerous life' ended in tragedy

MURDER victim Megan Bills had a difficult start in life and was put into foster care at the age of four but her fortunes changed two years later when she was placed with a loving Stourbridge family.

Dawn and Martin Bills, who already had a son – James, now aged 26 – formally adopted the seven year old the following year and she took their surname, she had previously been Megan Smith. Megan attended two local schools – St James Church of England Primary and then Ridgewood High School – enjoyed swimming, sang in a church choir and played the flute.

Then she started becoming increasingly independent. "It all seemed to happen in the blink of an eye," recalled her mother. At the age of 16 Megan moved in with the family of her then boyfriend Josh Edwards, now 19, who she met in August 2014.

She left school the following year and went to Dudley College where she passed a year-long hairdressing course in 2016 before beginning more advanced training at Halesowen College.

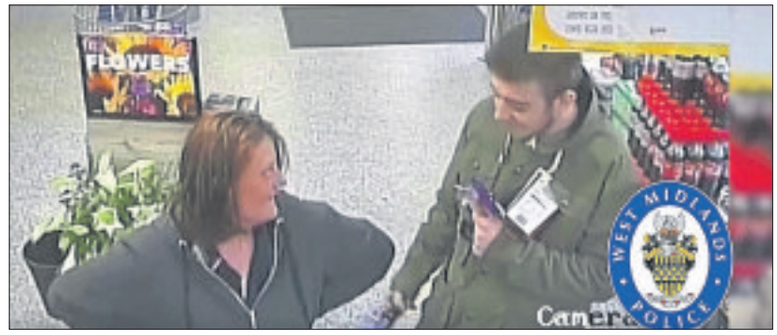
Changed

She moved into a housing project but spent increasing amounts of time at a bedsit in Hallchurch Road, Dudley, where her boyfriend now lived., breaking the terms of her tenancy Megan moved in with him full time at the start of last year but he found her a changed person.

Josh explained: "She was hanging around with the wrong people which led to rows between us. She would just leave and come back drunk. She was mixing with a different set of friends who I did not know."

The last of these was so bad that the police were called and the couple made a mutual decision to break up. Josh returned the flat keys to the council and went back to live with his parents on March 29 last year. He last saw her on April 14 – the day after Ashley Foster was freed on licence from Winson Green prison.

What neither he nor her adoptive parents realised, was that she had broken into his former flat and was squatting there. Megan had neither a mobile phone nor computer that worked which made it very difficult for her family to keep in touch. They last saw the teenager on April 11. Mrs Bills revealed: "We had made plans for her to move back in with us at the end of the May Bank Holiday but she asked for time and space to sort herself out first." As a result Mrs Bills did not report her as missing until May 5 – the day after the body was found in the wardrobe.



Ashley Foster chats with 17-year-old Megan Bills shortly after they first met, hours later he was to kill her

Foster admitted preventing the lawful burial of the teenager and a letter written by him to his mother gave police a vital breakthrough. The note, found in a cupboard, confessed to strangling Megan during violent sex but maintained it was an accident.

Analysis of his two mobile phones revealed that in the days following Megan's death he made numerous searches of the internet for 'snuff' movies – pornographic films involving murder.

Detective Inspector Caroline Corfield, who led police inquiries, said: "What normal human being would start searching this kind of porn after doing what he had done? It clearly turned him on."

Officers also recovered Megan's clothes and one of his shirts with her blood on it which had been dumped in a bin outside the hostel and could have been used to throttle her.

Mrs Bills had no idea that Megan had started to mix with people from the New Horizons hostel for ex-offenders in Highgate Road, Brierley Hill, where 24-year-old Foster was given a room after his release from prison.

He met Megan for the first time just hours before she died on April 16, Easter Sunday. She arrived at the hostel, where she had been several times previously, around midday. She asked Foster for a cigarette and quickly returned to his room to cadge another one. They left the hostel together soon afterwards to buy cannabis and bought cans of drink from a shop.The pair spent a short time at the hostel between two shopping trips before Megan returned with Foster for the final time around 1.50pm.

The hostel's CCTV showed them going into his room and captured Megan again in the doorway at 3.35pm. She was never seen alive again.

On May 3 staff at the hostel noticed a suspicious smell while carrying out the first monthly inspection of Foster's room. He blamed this on the carpet. The wardrobe was shrouded in a quilt. The following day staff made the gruesome discovery. Foster was arrested the same day after being spotted in Walsall town centre.

Foster's sister Carley Forrester said: "He is not the brightest and this led to bad decision making. The worst decision he ever made was to try to fulfil his perverse sexual fantasies with a girl he barely knew. It ended her life and destroyed his."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Memorial garden revamp is closer

A CAMPAIGN to refurbish a memorial garden for babies has moved a step forward after Dudley Council approached two trusts for funding.

Plans have been in the pipeline to improve Gornal Babies Memorial Garden at Gornal Wood Crematorium and Cemetery, after concerns it was becoming untidy. The council has approached two trusts for funds, which could see £25,000 generated, and one trust has already indicated it will help.

Councillor Ian Kettle, cabinet member for bereavement services, said: "The memorial garden is an important element of Gornal Wood cemetery, giving bereaved parents a dedicated space to contemplate and lay tributes to their lost children. By sensitively re-landscaping the space, with allocated and purpose-built compartments for precious objects, we hope to make a calming place to sit and reflect."

Corporate teams can enter road run

BUSINESS chiefs have backed a fun run which is again being held in Halesowen later this year.

The Black Country Chamber of Commerce supports The Black Country Road Run, which will be taking place on July 1.

The event is co-ordinated by Halesowen and Rowley Regis Rotary Club and this year the event will also include a corporate challenge.

Businesses can participate in either a 10km run or fun run with teams of five, which can be a team building exercise or promoting fitness in the workplace.

For more information go online to www.theblackcountryrun.com/corporate-challenge website.

Charity plea for more volunteers

A CHARITY that supports vulnerable adults in the Black Country is in need of more volunteers.

Dudley Advocacy needs support to help people with learning disabilities.

For more information contact Colette Barker on (01384) 456877 or info@dudleyadvocacy.org

New keep-fit class for the older generation

A NEW keep-fit class for the older generation is starting.

The gentle class, aimed at those new to exercise, is being held at the Oakfield Community Centre in Brierley Hill every Monday. The classes run from 11.15am to 12.15pm.

For more details call 07540 805497.

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IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Carrier bag charge is a pain on the pocket

IF THE comments by the chattering classes over the past few days are to be believed, one might be forgiven for thinking that the 5p charge on carrier bags has been an unparalleled success, rivalled only by sliced bread.

Maybe it's just me, but when I go to the supermarket checkout, I don't feel a sense of awe at the genius of those behind the scheme. I just feel discomfort as I stuff a packet of frozen peas in my trouser pocket because yet again I've left my bags in the car.

What is interesting is that I've just read that these "bags for life", which the do-gooders keep banging on about, are not quite as green as they would have us believe.

Recent research says they actually cause 175 times more damage to the environment than the conventional "throw away" ones. And let's be honest, did anybody actually thrown them away after using them just once? I've still got old bags dating back from the 1980s, which are used to store old newspapers and magazines.

Indeed, another statistic is that plastic shopping bags account for just 0.2 per cent of household waste, but I suppose we can't let the fact get in the way of a bit of virtue signalling.

But here's another thought, if plastic is so bad, instead of charging us 5p or 10p for our bags, why don't they just give us free paper bags like they used to? These could go in the recycling with our old newspapers, and everyone's a winner.

Anyhow, that argument seems to have been lost, and plastic-free aisles are about to become the next big thing. In five years time those shrink-wrapped apples and grapes will probably become as obsolete as ration books.

Sounds fair enough on paper, but I do wonder if anybody actually took the trouble to ask the supermarkets why they sell fruit and veg in plastic packaging to begin with.

Because an industry insider tells me it is not because supermarkets get some perverse pleasure out of wasting money or trying to destroy the planet. It is because the packaging has been carefully designed to make the produce last longer, in order to reduce waste.

So we might save on a bit of plastic here and there, but end up throwing away tons of perfectly good fruit and veg. And of course, when people do select the fruit and veg from the plastic-free aisle, they will put it into plastic bags.

Still, got to be seen to do something, haven't we?

Farewell to a legendary broadcaster, Ed Doolan

The passing of Ed Doolan, a broadcaster who never shied from telling it how it is

Donald Trump – not the first US President to have his intellect brought into question

Penelope Keith as Margo in The Good Life, a role which she will never shake off

Wheel be careful, driving in the city

THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

ACCORDING to new data, it is harder to pass your driving test in Wolverhampton than in most other parts of the country. Which poses an obvious question: how many drivers in Wolverhampton actually bother to take the test?

WHEREVER you drive in Britain you will witness occasional incidents of carelessness and inattention. But Wolverhampton is the only place where I've seen a driver with a plate on his lap eating a meat pie with a knife and fork, at the traffic lights. It takes a brave cop to come between a Black Country man and his pasty.

SO farewell, Ed Doolan, the veteran BBC broadcaster who died last week. Always good listening, always wise company, Doolan believed there was less evil in the world than some people seemed to think, and that when life seems to conspire against us, it's probably just a cock-up. As he told me nearly 20 years ago: "Never put down to malice anything you can put down to stupidity. It's usually something that's gone wrong or some jobsworth throwing his weight around on a bad morning."

DOOLAN is generally described as a champion of the underdog. But some underdogs strained his patience. I remember a caller to his Radio WM show complaining that there was a gap in her fence and her kids were getting out and playing by the road. "You get a hammer, some nails and some wood,"said Doolan, "and you fix the hole." He repeated this patiently, word for word, several times until the protesting caller got the message and hung up. "Ah, the dependency culture," sighed Doolan. He had a soft heart but was never a soft touch.

A READER, who apparently wishes half the population dead, writes: "When the current batch of Little Englanders are pushing up the daisies, the young people of today will be in charge and will reapply to join the EU." Splendid. I have taken the liberty of drafting the question for the 2040 EU Referendum voting form: "Hey, kids, would you like Britain to become one of the chief financiers and the military wing of the Great European Empire, now embracing Turkey and Albania and pushing its borders up against Russia and Syria? Or would you prefer Britain to remain the independent, peaceful and prosperous global trading nation it is now in 2040, controlling its own frontiers, respected throughout the world and acting as friend and honest broker to the USA, China, Russia and Europe?"

DONALD Trump is not the first US president to be mocked for his intellect, or lack of it. There was an unkind, and untrue, story of President George W Bush being horrified at a news report that three Brazilian soldiers had been killed in Iraq. "Remind me again," the president asked his aides. "How many is a brazillion?"

I WAS reminded of that tale by a letter in the Daily Telegraph this week suggesting a new name for any unimaginably large sum of money. Carillions.

NO matter how they package and rebrand her, Penelope Keith, currently presenting Village of the Year (C4), is forever Margo, the snifty, houseproud snob from The Good Life. And whichever village finally emerges as the winner in this oddly-conceived daytime show, I bet you won't be allowed to visit it until Margo has made you take off your muddy boots.

INCIDENTALLY, I see one of the shortlisted villages is my regular holiday haunt of Beer in Devon. Whatever Margo says, just stay away. You'd hate it. Really.

ONE of the claims made by a retired officer during the debate on army recruiting is that war is good for recruitment. I know of no official figures to support this but I do recall the steady stream of would-be heroes who turned up at my local TA drill hall in 1982 eager to join the colours and do their bit in the Falklands. Some were of the generation that just missed National Service when it was wound up in the 1960s. "I always felt I was cheated of something," one of them told me.

CHEATED? But of what? The great thing about National Service was the unknown. I knew two blokes who were called up in the 1950s. One spent his two years "counting blankets at Catterick," as he put it. The other spent it on Sunderland flying boats in the Far East. When people talk about bringing back National Service, they should tell us what sort of National Service they mean. Put me down for the Sunderlands.

PETER Rhodes will be speaking at Wolverhampton Literature Festival on Sunday, January 28. See: http://www.wolvesliteraturefestival.co.uk/peter-rhodes/4594118684

TALKING POINT

Struggling to keep those new year goals

'Less is more' was the theme when it came to making my 2018 New Year resolutions. As the clock chimed 12 I determined I would eat and spend less and not swear so much.

Come December 31 2018 there will be a slimline, more ladylike me with more available funds in my purse and a not-so stressed credit card.

The only 'more' I was allowing myself was with reading, in the hope this lead to greater relaxation.

But a little early research proved a tad disheartening. Statistics show that only eight per cent of people actually stick to their resolutions, with losing weight and spending less the most common goals.

However, in retrospect, the first month of the year is not a good time to make such resolutions.

For example, the 25 per cent of us who have resolved to spend less forgot one great obstacle – the January sales. The four-letter word is emblazoned over every shop and supermarket window tormenting us, pulling at our purse strings.

Not only did I trawl the rails and racks of every high street fashion shop, I bought a three-piece suite. It was half price, though, and I don't have to start paying for a year so does that actually count as a fail? Then there is the challenge for the 32 per cent of us determined to eat less. Firstly, the cupboards are still full of all the extra food shipped in for Christmas, exasperated by the selection of chocolates and sweets Santa popped in your stocking.

All this food can't just be allowed to get to waste. And, as we are in the throes of winter, our bodies demand we eat more to protect against the weather, it's like hibernation. I am genetically programmed to fail on this resolution.

No excuses for not curbing my foul mouth though. Despite the provocation of some frankly appalling drivers who would thoroughly deserve the unladylike profanities, this is achievable. However, at 20p a time per curse it is further compounding my failure to spend less.

Success, so far, however on the reading, thanks to a small library of Christmas gift books and an unwillingness to break away from the fire and venture out on a cold, dark evening.

This would achieve the aim of being more relaxed if I wasn't so worried about how much I was spending on a new sofa, all the calories I had consumed to make a dent in the food mountain and how much the journey on the M6 had benefitted the swear jar. But I remain convinced that less is more – next year I will make fewer resolutions.

DIANE DAVIES

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Revive main line rail rather than trams

YOU reported that our Dudley councillors want to bring some visitors to the Commonwealth Games by an 11km tram line on our mainline railway to Sandwell's main line, where they would have to change.

There is no need, if the councillors and MPs could rise from their stupor and make use of the full 120 km to bring people from all over the UK by regional and intercity trains straight into Brum via Stourbridge and Bescot.

They still think they can only have slow trams when they actually have a fast, main line railway through the heart of the Black Country and its capital, Dudley, at Castle Gate. All that is missing are the stations and fast trains!

The leisure/tourist attractions, hotels, eating places and food stores are at the bottom of Castle Hill in Low Town where the Dudley main line railway station is. Rebuild it and use it for trains without bothering with shuttling passengers on the tram to Sandwell's main line. You have your own. Use it fully and sensibly. Connect to High Town with an electric bus service at a fraction of the price of the grossly extravagant and unnecessarily wasteful Metro tram.

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TIM WELLER
Halesowen

Can't afford to feed, so don't breed

SCHOOLS don't just teach anymore.

The ever-changing roles of the schools and teachers now includes taking on parental roles.

In a First World country in the 21st century, school doesn't just educate; in fact, schools are feeding their pupils breakfast, washing and laundering children's uniforms, and even charging up phones for parents who run out of electricity tokens.

I can't imagine what would happen to some of these children if it wasn't for these extra-curricular services!

We're not a developing nation, no child should be turning up to school with an empty stomach or in dirty clothes.

The time has come to remind parents of the most basic of needs; and it's harsh but true that if they can't afford to feed, they shouldn't breed!

VICKY H BARTLETT
Dudley

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
Dudley Chronicle,
Chronicle Editorial,
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Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES

EMAIL
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ipso. For press freedom with responsibility

Call to halt fuss over Bell End name

I WOULD like to point out that the majority of the residents of Bell End, some of them elderly, do not want the name changed and this has been very upsetting for us all.

It was started last year when some teenagers posted a photograph of themselves on social media, sitting on the road sign for Bell End and laughing. This road sign later 'disappeared'.

We are fed up with all this unwanted publicity which has been blighting our lives. We want to be left in peace to enjoy living in Bell End.

PATRICIA WALKER
Rowley Regis

Too much waste in the NHS

I DO not agree that Theresa May is single handedly responsible for the state of the NHS. Surely the head of the NHS has to take some responsibility for the terrible situation it is currently in.

Whilst some of the problem may be attributed to lack of funding, certainly there are other issues to be addressed. The money has to be used in the best possible way and waste cut to a minimum. It's obvious that this is not being done by the people who run the NHS.

Expensive drugs are regularly thrown away, expensive equipment is not retrieved by hospitals from patients who no longer require it, and paramedics in ambulances are frequently sent out to deal with regular local drunks.

We need to look at the funding as a whole and how efficiently its being used before we demand the resignation of the PM.

CHRIS BAKER
Halesowen

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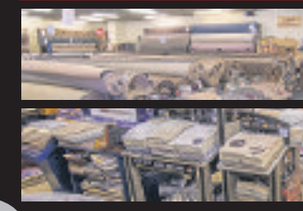

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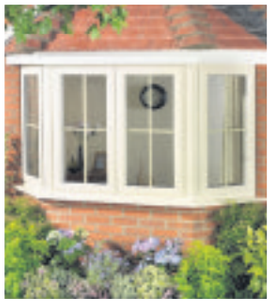

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They're in the house – they've got a gun!

A POLICEWOMAN feared she would die as a teenager pointed what looked like a handgun at her.

Pc Jemma Follows was responding to a report of a burglary in Stourbridge when she was confronted in the dark by 19-year-old Reece Lones.

The officer yelled at Lones, asking what he was doing but the teenager pulled out a gun. It was only later that it was found to be an imitation.

Pc Follows reacted by pointing her Taser weapon at Lones but then the police constable heard a 'click'.

The 29-year-old admitted she thought she was going to die and her two young children would lose their mother. But instead Lones dodged into another room.

In a dramatic video, released by police from Pc Follows' body-camera, she can be heard appealing for back-up on her radio saying 'Oscar 91 they're in the house and they've got a gun'.

Taxi

She ran outside and jumped into a nearby taxi to hunt Lones down. He had fled out of the back of the house in Park Street, Stourbridge. The taxi took the officer to where the suspects were last seen. She then tasered a 17-year-old who had been acting aggressively. He was alleged to have had a knife and cannabis in his possession.

Lones,was arrested two hours later after being spotted by firearms officers on Stourbridge's busy High Street.

Dash-cam footage from their patrol car can be seen in the police video as they screech to a halt in the High Street before jumping out shouting at Lones to get on the ground at gunpoint.

Wolverhampton Crown Court heard Lones had been armed with an imitation handgun designed to look like a 9mm semi-automatic pistol. It was found dumped in the house from which the defendant ran away.

Reece Lones has been sent to a young offenders institution

Pc Jemma Follows believed she may never see her children again

The property is owned by his mother and was not occupied at the time. He had 'issues' with his father and, on November 5, she agreed to let her son live there for a short time. Ten days later she asked him to leave. But Lones, who did not have a key, had nowhere else to stay and got back inside through a damaged skylight on November 18, activating an alarm he did not know had been installed, and police were called at 10pm.

Pc Follows, an officer with eight years experience, recalled: "When I initially saw the gun I was completely shocked as, in my whole career, I have never encountered a firearm on the streets. I believed there was a realistic chance I would be shot. I was scared. I have two very young children and believed for a moment that I might not see them again"

Mr Shiva Misra, defending Lones, who had two previous convictions for criminal damage, conceded: "He was in drink and was foolish in the extreme. Goodness knows why he had the gun but he understands how scared and fearful the officer was."

Lones, of no fixed address, pleaded guilty to possession of an imitation firearm with intention to cause fear and was given two years three months detention in a young offenders institution.

The other teenager, who was Tasered, can't be named for legal reasons. He was charged and given a conditional caution.

● See the video of the incident at www.expressandstar.com

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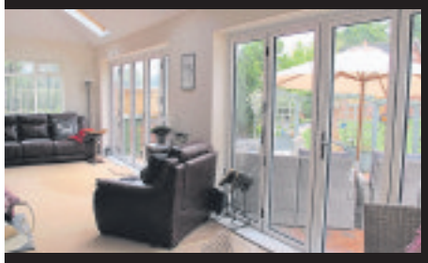

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Bikers rally around to help the homeless

KIND-HEARTED bikers braved the cold on a mass ride out from Halesowen in aid of a voluntary group for the homeless and vulnerable.

More than 60 riders took part in the West Midlands Motorcycle Action Group (MAG) Charity Run in aid of Stourbridge-based Leslie's Care Packages for the homeless.

Loaded up with hundreds of bags of essential provisions, riders set out en masse from Streetbike, Dudley Road, Halesowen, recently. They hit the roads for the 20-mile run to the Food Stop Café, near Bridgnorth, where they were greeted by Leslie's Care Packages founder, Vi Wood.

The voluntary group was set up by Vi in 2016 in loving tribute to her late husband Leslie, after she and her own family fell on difficult times. Since then, Vi has dedicated all her free time to helping people in need across the borough.

She said: "It was absolutely wonderful to see support from so many riders. Their amazing donations will help make such a difference to people's lives. I'm overwhelmed and can't thank them enough."

Leslie's Care Packages not only helps the homeless, but also those who face difficult times, providing much-needed provisions and practical hands-on support.

Now the group is on a mission to set up a special drop-in centre.

Vi added: "Homelessness isn't a choice, it can happen to any one of us at any time for a host of reasons.

"Support has been simply fantastic so far and now we want to take our cause to the next level. We're on a mission to find a suitable venue for a dedicated drop-in centre locally, somewhere people can go to get food, shelter and warmth in winter."

Colin Brown, of MAG, said: "It is rewarding being able to help in some small way with the work that Vi and her team do for the community."

Visit www.lesliescarepackages.org for more information.

Leslie's Care Packages founder Vi Wood with members of West Midlands Motorcycle Action Group

Major warehouse development now to get under way

WORK is due to start on a multi-million pound industrial development in Tipton that could help deliver a major jobs boost for the Black Country.

It comes more than a year after developer CEG secured planning permission from Sandwell Council for its ambitious $£32 million scheme to overhaul the historic Vaughan Trading Estate in Tipton, creating up to 1,000 jobs. Another 200 will be created by the building work.

The scheme involves flattening most of the existing buildings on land neighbouring the Thomas Dudley foundry and CAB Autos factory.

The start of work comes at a time when top quality industrial and warehouse space is in short supply.

Developer CEG aims to create up to 500,000 sq feet of space at Vaughan Park. Work on the first phase is set to commence shortly. CEG secured planning permission for the regeneration of the historic 28 acre site in September 2016 and is now managing the development of the first phase of units. This will offer up to five units totalling 80,000 sq ft and CEG says it will be ready for occupation later this year. Further 'design and build' opportunities are also available on the site.

Lawrence Escott, investment manager at CEG said: "This is a buoyant West Midlands commercial location."

Mayor's tax increase proposal is rejected

THE West Midlands Mayor's plans to add more than £10 a year onto council tax bills have been rejected by his own cabinet.

Andy Street initially wanted to raise his council tax precept by £12, but settled on £10.80 for each Band D property in a bid to pay for the running of his office and his transport plans.

But the Tory Metro Mayor's proposals were thrown out by the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) cabinet, which includes five Labour council leaders and two Conservatives.

Metro Mayor Andy Street

The Labour leaders – including Steve Eling from Sandwell Council and Sean Coughlan from Walsall Council – all voted against the plans.

Wolverhampton Council's Roger Lawrence was away and did not vote. However, his stand-in Councillor Pete Bilson, voted down the plan – a move that prompted surprise in some quarters after the WMCA agreed to prop up the city council's Interchange project, which has gone more than £30m over budget.

The cabinet, led by Coventry City Council leader George Duggins, is thought to have opposed the rise in protest at Government cuts to town hall budgets.

Councillor Coughlan said: "This was the first vote in a process that will see consultation and scrutiny, followed by a final vote in February. We were minded that as part of the consultation the public might say they don't want to put tax up, and on this occasion we agreed not to support the proposal. However, nothing is final and we do not want to pre-empt the decision of the consultation."

The £10.80-a-year increase had been proposed to raise £7.5 million to run the WMCA. If it is not approved, the Mayor could be forced to divert funds from other projects to cover the costs.

Parties on all sides believe that a compromise can be reached before next month's final vote.

A WMCA spokesman said: "The report to the combined authority board was the first formal stage of a scrutiny and consultation process that will run until February 9 when the board is scheduled to make the decision on the proposed budget.

"Options are being considered in light of the board's decision and further discussions on the draft budget will be held with WMCA members, the business community and other stakeholders in the run-up to February 9."

Mr Street, who was elected as the region's first Metro Mayor last year, recently described the figure as 'a relatively small amount' and said it was vital for the region's economic prosperity.

"We have said we are going to invest in our transport and bust congestion," he said.

"We have to actually have the capital investment available to do that."

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Fine for cabbie who refused guide dog

A TAXI DRIVER who refused to pick up a blind man and his guide dog, claiming he was allergic to dogs and frightened of them, has been ordered to pay more than £1,000.

Jason Lane and his guide dog Crispin had to order another taxi after Abdul Khalik said he would not take them from Bearwood into Birmingham city centre. They were on their way to celebrate Jason's mother's birthday.

Mr Lane, 48, said: "It was really frustrating. I had my 84-year-old mum waiting for me in Birmingham and the taxi was already late, then he literally just drove off.

Mr Lane said he regularly used the taxi company Premier Cars in Langley and had never had a problem travelling with Crispin before.

Khalik, 42, of Crompton Road, Handsworth, defended himself through an interpreter at Walsall Magistrates Court. He denied refusing to have an assistance dog in his car but claimed he was both allergic and frightened of dogs.

Khalik was found guilty of failure/refusal to carry out a booking made by a disabled person accompanied by an assistance dog. He was given a 12-month conditional discharge and ordered to pay Sandwell Council's £1,030 costs plus a £20 victim surcharge. He surrendered his taxi licence after the matter was reported to the council.

It's a boy! Dendi is zoo's new arrival

Dudley Zoo's baby baboon Dendi is the second for Addis

IT'S a boy! The gender of a zoo's newest addition has been revealed.

Keepers at Dudley Zoo threw a 'gender reveal party' for the gelada baboon, which delighted the attraction's other resident baboons.

This saw two boxes packed with coloured plastic children's balls, hay and treats put in the gelada's indoor den. It didn't take long for 13-year-old alpha male Elano and adult female, Tana, to tip out blue balls and reveal the news that new addition Dendi is a boy – his fourth son. The youngster is the second baby for 11-year-old Addis, who is also mum to three-year-old Billie.

The new baby was born on December 21 and has been named after Mount Dendi, the second highest volcano in Ethiopia, which is the home country of the species.

Dendi joins brothers Billie, Gimbi and Ambo – who spent hours afterwards playing with the ball-pit balls – as well as adult females Jimma and Tana in their half-acre natural hillside enclosure on the lower zoo site.

Special Ned's ale is Wonder-ful Stuff

THE Wonder Stuff and Ned's Atomic Dustbin have teamed up with a brewery to launch a limited edition ale.

Ned's Wonder has been created with Birmingham's Froth Blowers Brewing Company for this year's Love From Stourbridge tour.

A competition is being held to win a place at a special acoustic concert and tasting session with Wonder Stuff frontman Miles Hunt and Ned's Atomic Dustbin singer Jonn Penney in Stourbridge on January 31.

The Love From Stourbridge tour featuring The Wonder Stuff and Ned's Atomic Dustbin takes place in April. The bands will also be joined by DJ Graham Crabb from Pop Will Eat Itself, another Stourbridge band.

There are two dates at Birmingham's O2 Academy on April 14 and 15, and the first has already sold out.

● Penney for his thoughts – page 27

Councils find trafficked child victims of modern day slavery

COUNCILS in the Black Country and Staffordshire picked up 13 suspected child victims of human trafficking and modern day slavery in three months.

Figures from the National Crime Agency show how many referrals were made to the UK Human Trafficking Centre (UKHTC) from July to September last year. There were 14 across our region.

Five came from Dudley Council, four from Wolverhampton, three from Sandwell Council and one each from both Walsall and Stafford Borough Council. All were children apart from one adult referred from Dudley. West Midlands Police referred 27, including three children, over the same period.

Referrals are made to the UKHTC to determine if they are a victim of human trafficking or modern slavery. During the investigation the person is given a safe house and 45 days 'recovery period'.

If deemed a victim they can remain in the UK if they co-operate with police under a year-long stay, or if they successfully apply through the Home Office.

Family inspires comic's new show

COMEDIAN David Baddiel will bring his new one-man show to Dudley Town Hall on April 19.

The Olivier Award nominated My Family: Not the Sitcom arrives in Dudley following its sold out run at London's Menier Chocolate Factory and in the West End.

It is described as a show about memory, ageing, infidelity, dysfunctional relatives, social media, golf and gay cats. Tickets cost £25.50 and can be bought by calling the box office on (01384) 812812 or at the boroughhalls.co.uk website.

Writer and comic Baddiel first found fame as part of The Mary Whitehouse Experience with Rob Newman and went on to work with the Black Country's Frank Skinner, including Fantasy Football.

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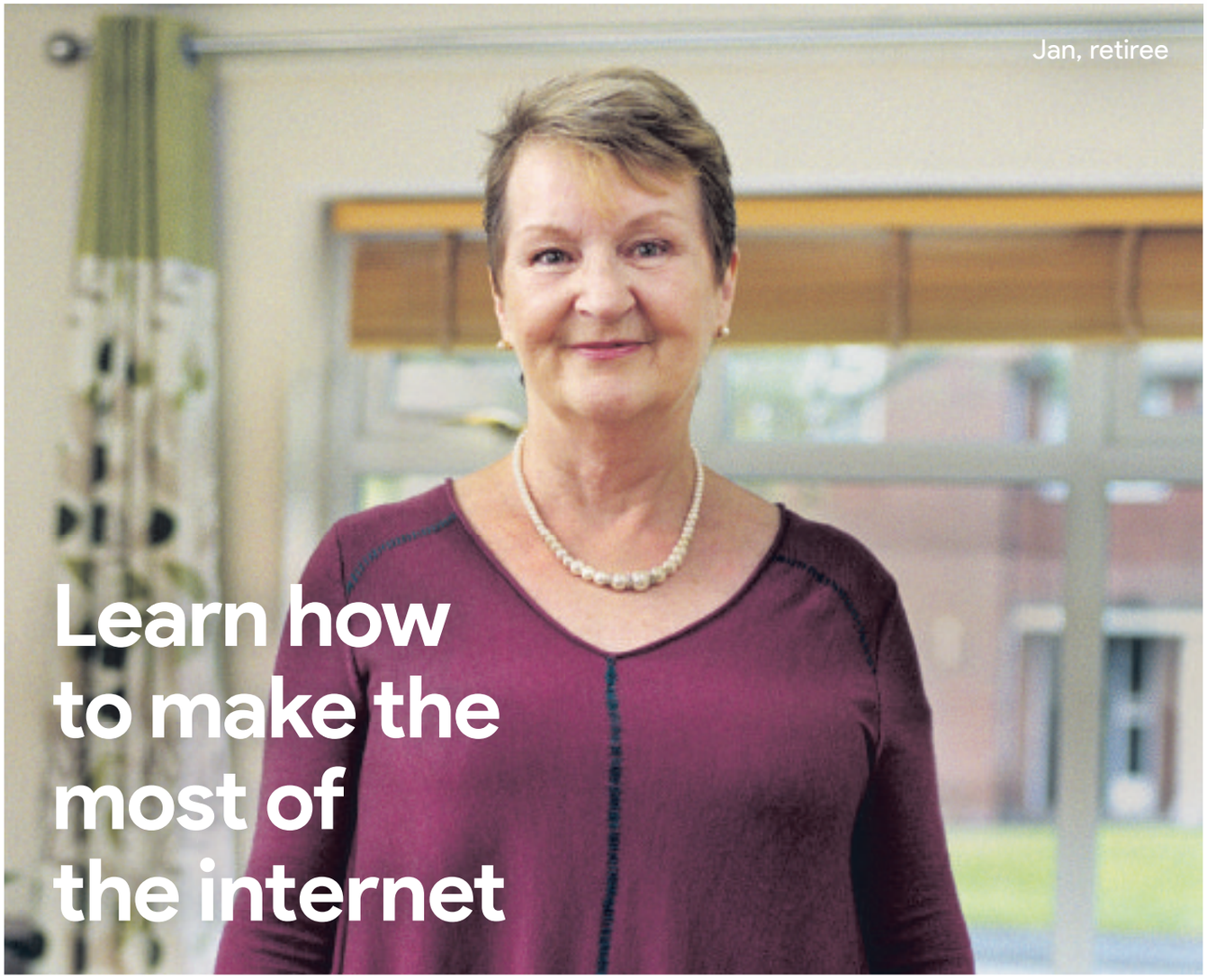

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It's a tough job but surrounded by the professional dancers and female stars Ore seemed to love hosting the tour

Debbie's the darling of Strictly

REVIEW

By Sue Attwater

Strictly Come Dancing Live Tour – Arena Birmingham

IT seemed fairly obvious who the favourite was as we walked into Arena Birmingham to take our seats for the Strictly Come Dancing Live Tour.

"I can't wait to see Debbie McGee," said one. " She's so amazing," cooed another. And the packed Arena seemed to echo that. When she did her first dance – the jive – the applause was deafening

And, after topping the leader board level with the reigning TV series champion Joe McFadden, it was Debbie who walked off with the glitter ball. This 11th tour kicked off in Birmingham on Friday night in stunning fashion with golden palm trees and statues – supposed to be the dancing Oscars? Certainly the professional dancers in their gold skimpy outfits would grace any film set.

The host, 2016 series winner Ore Oduba, came on to rapturous applause and introduced the professional dancers, including Amy Dowden from Dudley who runs a dance school with her fiance.

Their performances were very impressive, as commented on by the three judges the usual Craig Revel Horwood – "Did you leave your smile at home?" commented Ore who bantered well with him and the other two judges Dame Darcey Bussell, her first time judging on tour and the very sparkly-suited Bruno Tonioli.

Then on to the really important ones – the stars including, of course Debbie and Joe, with the rest of the magnificent seven including Gemma Atkinson, Susan Calman, Davood Ghadami, Jonnie Peacock and Alexandra Burke, who all performed their two favourite dances from the TV series with the judges giving their score, for guidance only.

In the end it was the audience's choice as they texted the name of the person they wanted to win. And with each text 10p went to Sport Relief.

The TV show has been nominated for a top award and the audience was encouraged by Ore to vote. There is no doubt both the series and the live tour are definitely worth a 10.

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10	Strictly Come Dancing	Doubletree	1	175.00
10	Mamma Mia	Hilton	1	169.50
10	Wicked	Day Excursion	-	75.00
11	Strictly Come Dancing	Hilton Waldorf	1	195.00
14	Cilla The Musical – Oxford	Day Excursion	-	69.50
15	Annie	Day Excursion	-	75.00
18	Sunday Lunch Thames Cruise	Hilton Waldorf	1	159.50
24	Wicked or Phantom	Hilton	1	From 135.00
MARCH	**SHOW / EXCURSION**	**HOTEL**	**NIGHTS**	**PRICE £**
01	Warner Studios – Harry Potter	Day Excursion	-	69.50
02	Woman in Black and Afternoon Tea Cruise	Marriott	2	199.50
02	Mamma Mia or Kinky Boots and Afternoon Tea Cruise	Marriott	2	From 225.00
02	Phantom of the Opera	Marriott	2	199.50
02	Adele Tribute plus Isle of Wight Tour	Hilton	2	185.00
03/10/17/24	Harry Potter plus Film Locations	Hilton	1	149.50
05	D Day Divas Tour, Live Entertainment & A Tea	Day Excursion	-	57.50
09/16/23	Diana Fashion Story, The Shard and A Tea Cruise	Marriott	2	249.50
16	42nd Street	Marriott	2	235.00
16	Les Miserables	Marriott	2	239.50
17	Cilla The Musical	Doubletree	1	159.50
18	Ideal Home Show Exhibition	Day Excursion	-	39.50
23	Wicked or Phantom	Marriott	2	199.50
30	John Bishop in Liverpool	Mercure	2	199.50
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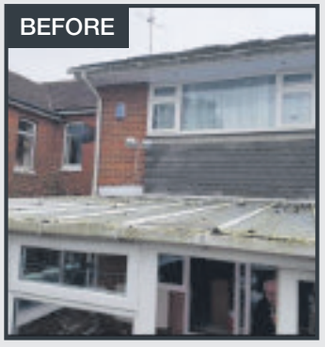

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Thousands set to enjoy city literature festival

ALMOST 100 acts will help bring an eclectic mix of music, art, theatre and comedy to the city for the second Wolverhampton Literature Festival.

Organiser Phil Turner said the team behind the festivities hope visitor numbers will top last year's record of 3,000.

He said: "It was so successful last year, we just wanted to do it again. There's never been anything like this in the city before and there's so much writing and literary talent in Wolverhampton.

"Last year, and this year, it basically happened on the good will and the talents of people. Every single act was local but this year we have spread it a little bit further."

Venues

The three-day festival will see events spill into venues across the city including Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Newhampton Arts Centre, The Slade Rooms, Bantock House and The Grand Theatre.

Workshops, theatrical performances and debates, as well as events for children including storytelling, have been included on the line-up.

Award-winning writer and journalist Will Self will headline the celebrations, which will run from Friday until Sunday.

Slade drummer Don Powell, Magnum keyboardist Mark Stanway, Only Fools and Horses actor John Challis and author Lynsey Hanley will also feature.

The 'Great Big Children's Story Time' event will see families enjoy storytelling at Wolverhampton's 16 libraries simultaneously from 11.30am on Saturday. Mr Turner said: "The festival keeps the city and the venues quite vibrant because there is so much going on and that's the way it should be."

Three themes – music and literature, politics and journalism and community voices – are set to run throughout the three-day celebrations.

Slade drummer Don Powell

Novelist and journalist Will Self

Mark Stanway of rock band Magnum

John Challis, best known as Boycie

Wolverhampton council's libraries services won £13,250 of funding from the Arts Council's Grants for Arts programme to help grow this year's festival, which is supported by the Express & Star.

The funding boost meant the literature festival is secured for the next four years.

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COMMERCIAL SUPPLEMENT

Stourbridge Chronicle

COLLECTION

for 2018

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Telly Beds Brierley Hill

Stourbirdge Hearing Centre

Brierley Hill Bathrooms

Aristocraft - Brierley Hill

Dreamland - Brierley Hill

A 8-page supplement showcasing a collection of businesses and organisations in the region with a reputation for excellence

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Bathroom suites on offer to suit all styles and budgets

Find your perfect bath design at Brierley Hill Bath Warehouse.

Established more than 20 years ago, the business, close to Merry Hill Centre and Dudley town centre, has long been supplying and fitting bathrooms across the local area, meeting the needs of both domestic and commercial customers.

Brierley Hill Bath Warehouse has established a loyal client base and built an excellent reputation. From an impressive showroom complete with products from leading brands, owner Alec Price and his team can offer an extensive range of suites to suit all budgets. As well as selling direct from their showroom, owner Alec Price and his team offer a full design and fitting service for clients.

On average the fitting process takes between one and two weeks. All of Brierley Hill Bath Warehouse's fitters are highly skilled and experienced and complete every job to only the highest standards.

The company also has a unique Slip Not safety treatment that will guard against any stumbles in the shower.

So, for more about protecting your loved ones in the shower or treating yourself to a brand new bathroom, contact Brierley Hill Bathrooms.

Sleep easy in the knowledge of quality products and low prices

Commercial feature

Here at tellybeds.co.uk we have a long history within the furniture industry.

We are celebrating 12 years in business in Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill. Our online store, tellybeds.co.uk is a continuum of our retail outlets' success, designed to provide an excellent service, at what we believe to be the most competitive prices currently available on the internet.

We provide a large number of beds in addition to Tellybeds, while our sister websites focus on adjustable beds which can be found at dreameasy.co.uk and waterbeds which can be found at waterbedwarehouse.co.uk

Essential

We have a long tradition of serving the needs of our customers, both locally and nationally. We feel it was essential to use the knowledge we have gained over the years to expand our business right across the UK.

Our range is built around good quality products, at some of the lowest prices, coupled with increased efficiency. We believe service is everything, from the moment you order we want you to know you are given the best possible attention. We are always here to answer your calls whenever the situation arises.

If you have any questions regarding the products, or any questions at all please don't hesitate to give us a call.

Tellybeds has a long tradition of serving the needs of its customers

Here at Tellybeds it is our mission statement not only to listen to you the customer, but to learn from you, helping us build on our business model. With continued success we aim to drive down prices for the consumer providing high quality products for a real low cost alternative.

Here at Tellybeds, our staff come from a variety of backgrounds, including furniture manufacturing, furniture retail, IT to name a few, we believe we have a dedicated and committed team whose number one objective is to serve our customers with the standards they have come to expect. We believe the no pressure environment of our online store, together with its vast array of products all at low low prices will make an enjoyable shopping experience, one that separates us from our competitors – hopefully you share the same expectations and beliefs we hold true.

Come and visit us at Tellybeds, The Old Dairy, Brettell Lane, Brierley Hill, West Midlands, DY5 3JL

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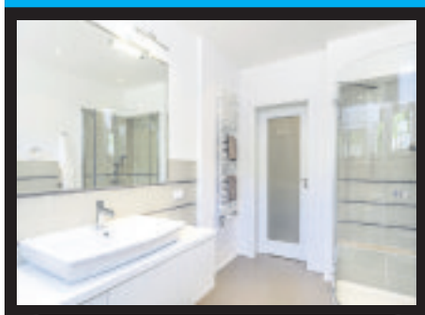

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Get expert advice from trusted professionals at Rydale Windows (Manufacturing) Limited

Window firm with a wealth of experience

Investing in new windows and doors or a conservatory is a huge commitment, so it is vital to get expert advice from trusted professionals.

Rydale Windows (Manufacturing) Limited have a wealth of experience and will spend time with you, thoroughly discussing your options.

Offering a 10-year insurance backed guarantee, they will never ask for a deposit or stage payments – with customers only paying after the installation is complete.

And after they've left you to enjoy your new purchase, they won't just walk off into the sunset. In the unlikely event of something going wrong with your windows, doors or conservatory you'll be fully covered for after care with your guarantee.

The company, which is based in Halesowen, can also assist with repairs and maintenance problems with your current windows, doors and conservatories regardless of who originally fitted them.

These are people who definitely know what they're doing!

And, if you're scratching your head for ideas on how to fund your new project, they can give you some help. A company spokesman said: "A Barclays Home Improvement Account offers you the ideal way to fund your home improvement."

Rydale Windows (Manufacturing) Ltd's products are fabricated 'in house', utilising their own specialist PVCu manufacturing plant. The company has over 30 years experience, and are a major supplier of quality PVCu installations of windows, doors, conservatories, porches, orangeries and fascia and soffit boards throughout the West Midlands.

"All installations are fully supervised from initial design through to final installation by expert Rydale operatives," added the company spokesman.

The team of expert fitters have a wealth of experience and are recommended for their polite, courteous and tidy approach.

Rydale Windows (Manufacturing) Ltd is Certass registered and Fair Trades and No Rogue Traders Here approved.

In addition the company is fully compliant with Document L Building Regulations.

"Our approach ensures a consistently high level of quality control and also allows our customers to achieve considerable savings by buying direct," added their company spokesman.

Their A rated windows, which reduce heat loss by more than 20 per cent, are fitted as standard and can save over £250 off your heating bill in the first year alone.

At Rydale Windows they take security very seriously. "All of our doors and windows are fitted with high security multi point locks."

For further information contact Rydale Windows (Manufacturing) Limited on 0800 917 6060 or visit www.rydalewindows.co.uk

A seamless journey to your dream kitchen or bedroom

Commercial feature

STUNNING and bespoke kitchens and bedrooms with the 'wow' factor are the hallmark of an established family-run business in Brierley Hill.

Aristocraft Kitchens and Bedrooms, which is based on Enterprise Trading Estate, prides itself on creating state-of-the-art, award-winning designs and meticulous, high quality installations at prices ranging from £3,000 to £30,000.

From inception to completion, the company's dedicated project management team will guide customers effortlessly through their journey to a beautiful new kitchen or bedroom. And as you'd expect from a firm set up more than 30 years ago, the aftercare service is second to none.

Just one of the many stunning designs on offer

Accreditation

Founded in 1982, Aristocraft is the only firm in the area to gain accreditation to the British Institute of Kitchen, Bedroom and Bathroom Installation, which is the UK's first, and only, government-sanctioned institute dedicated to kitchen, bedroom and bathroom installation. All of the company's fitters are also BIKBBI accredited so customers can rest assured that installation work is carried out by the very best in the business.

Alternatively, the company offers a 'self fit' service for those who would prefer to carry out their own installation but with ongoing help and guidance from Aristocraft.

A key member of the friendly and professional Aristocraft team is design director Caroline Davies, daughter of founder Bryn Davies. With a prestigious KBB kitchen designer award to her name, Caroline is the 'go-to' girl for a unique kitchen. Mr Davies explained: "The design services of Caroline and our vastly-experienced team are available free and with no obligation.

"We will carry out a home survey to get a proper feel for the room then create a CAD design using the very latest technology.

"State-of-the-art design packages allow us to produce reality photographs to show customers what their new kitchen will look like. All of our kitchens are made to order to exact requirements and are not flat packs."

All Aristocraft's impressive ranges can be viewed at the 10,000 square foot showroom in Pedmore Road, which showcases 30 displays.

Turning your ideal kitchen into a dream come true

Commercial feature

Dream Doors Stourbridge provides fitted kitchens, replacement kitchen doors and a range of kitchen services to local residents.

Here, you can achieve your dream kitchen for up to 60 per cent less than the cost of a refit.

Most design experts would agree that after seven or eight years, a kitchen can start to look dated. However, a full kitchen refit can result in considerable upheaval as well as being expensive and environmentally unfriendly.

The approach at Dream Doors Stourbridge is to reuse and reduce where possible. In most cases, we find that existing kitchen units are suitable for reuse, and all that's needed is some new kitchen doors and worktops to achieve a new kitchen look.

Dream Doors offers replacement doors and kitchen services to DY postcodes

Quality

While the quality of our work is first-rate, there are also considerable 'green' benefits to using Dream Doors to replace your kitchen. We only use UK manufacturers and local suppliers to lower our carbon footprint and also safely dispose of and recycle any waste accumulated from your kitchen replacement.

At Dream Doors Stourbridge, we offer our replacement kitchen doors and kitchen services to local DY postcode areas, including Stourbridge, Kinver, Sedgley, Wordsley, Wollaston, Hagley, Kingsford all the way down to Kidderminster, Bewdley, Bliss Gate, Stourport-on-Severn, Areley Kings, Waresley and all local West Midlands UK areas.

If you'd like to visit our showroom, manager and kitchen expert Gary would be more than happy to discuss your kitchen needs.

If you've been dreaming of a new kitchen, Dream Doors can make it happen. Get in touch today on 01384 465597 or call into our showroom at 26 Lower High Street, Stourbridge, DY8 ITA.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR TINNITUS TODAY!

DO YOU SUFFER FROM NOISES IN YOUR EARS?

Tinnitus is the name given to the condition of noises 'in the ears' and/or 'in the head' with no external source.

There is a widely held mis-conception that tinnitus is confined to the elderly, but various studies have shown that it can occur at any age, even quite young children.

Experiences of tinnitus are very common in all age groups, especially following exposure to loud noise or infection; however, it is unusual for it to be a major problem.

Tinnitus noises are described variously as ringing, whistling, buzzing, humming and even chirping. The noises, known as subjective noise, meaning only the sufferer can hear it, may be heard in one ear, both ears or in the middle of the head or it may be difficult to pinpoint its exact location.

The noise may be low, medium or high-pitched. There may be a single noise or two or more components. The noise may be continuous or may come and go. And because the noise is subjective, it affects people in different ways.

For some it's a minor annoyance, one they can deal with easily. For others, it can result in more serious issues, such as:

- Long-term sleep disruption
- Changes in cognitive ability
- An inability to concentrate, such as completing tasks or reading
- Stress in relationships
- Anxiety and depression
- Employment challenges

Tinnitus is not a disease or illness, it is a symptom generated within a person's own auditory path-ways. The precise cause of tinnitus is still not fully understood but it is usually associated with ear infections, high blood pressure or, most common, hearing loss.

Currently, there is no known cure. No surgery or pill has been shown to get rid of tinnitus in any clinically accepted study, but there is relief.

Sound therapy can be effective in treating tinnitus because it may make the tinnitus less noticeable or mask the tinnitus. Hearing aids may be included as a critical component of a sound therapy programme.

Join us for Tinnitus Awareness Week
Monday 5th to Friday 9th February 2018

Tinnitus Treatment Solutions:

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- ✓ Mask or cover up your tinnitus
- ✓ Take your focus off your tinnitus

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"This was my first visit to Spectacle Store in Dudley but it will certainly not be my last. I have already recommended them to a couple of my family so we will definitely be back.

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G.S

"Thanks for being there? You saved me over £260 compared to vision express prices For exactly the same prescription?!!! And that is excellent. Thank You!"

M.P

What a helpful gentleman, he was most patient when I couldn't decide of frames, a good choice of frames and would certainly recommend the Spectacle Store.

J.B

Thank You for such excellent service, shown to me on my first visit to the Spectacle Store in Dudley. Looking forward to collecting my two new pairs of glasses soon.

L.G.

Valentine Gifts at Websters of Wollaston

A wide range of fresh flowers and bouquets made up daily

2017 was a very busy year for Websters of Wollaston, we celebrated the 50th anniversary since George and Margaret Webster first opened for business. Three generations of Websters and Rowbottoms have worked from the High Street shop since then and we're still a family business today. 2017 also saw Websters of Wollaston make our biggest change of all when we moved to fantastic purpose built new premesis next door to Grahams Place public house. This new year promises to be just as busy for us with Valentines day just around the corner. The old shop on the High Street may be gone but Websters are still here in Wollaston providing for the community.

Thank you for your custom Marion & Diane

Breakthrough Treatment Helps Patients

A Dudley woman says her life has been "turned around" by a revolutionary new treatment for her disabling lung disease.

Frances Clews was virtually housebound because of COPD (Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease). She was so breathless she was forced to spend her life in an armchair.

Sixty- eight years-old Frances couldn't even walk 100 yards, and was often unable to talk. She couldn't shower herself or do any household tasks at all and had to rely on her husband Colin to do all of the housework.

But in May 2016 Frances's son Alan spotted the newly-launched Salt Cave asthma and allergy clinic in The Waterfront East, Brierley Hill.

The Salt Cave offers dry aerosol halotherapy, a treatment in which patients inhale tiny salt particles. The particles have an antibiotic and anti-inflammatory effect on the lungs.

The Salt Cave in Dudley is one of just a handful of UK clinics now offering the therapy which is very popular in Eastern Europe.

Frances decided to give it a try, and after a few treatments, was able to stop using a reliever inhaler because she could breathe more easily. After a few more sessions, she found she could have longer conversations without becoming breathless.

Now Frances has improved so much she is able to go out with friends on day trips and walk for an hour without using a walking stick. She can do housework and has even joined a gym!

The retired sewing machinist described her transformation as "a new lease of life".

"Before I started the treatment I was using a nebuliser every four hours, as well as an inhaler and various medications, but I couldn't even walk 100 yards", explained Frances.

Zoe, manageress of the Salt Cave with client Frances Clews

"After having a shower, I would be gasping for air and need another puff on my inhaler before I could get dressed. I just sat in the chair all day because I could barely talk to anyone, let alone go anywhere.

"I used to need emergency steroids and antibiotics pretty much every month, but now I'm totally different- I have a transformed quality of life.

"I can go out on day trips to Bridgnorth with my friends and I haven't needed any emergency medicines since I began halotherapy.

"I can even do some housework now which has taken a lot of pressure off Colin.

"I'm also going to the Action Heart gym at Russells Hall Hospital, which would have been totally impossible before I started having salt therapy".

Halotherapy provides a controlled air environment which simulates the microclimate of natural salt caves.

Numerous studies carried out in Europe suggest that it is an effective drug-free treatment for asthma, chronic bronchitis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), sinusitis and many other respiratory and skin conditions, as well as the hereditary disorder cystic fibrosis.

Just two of these conditions- asthma and COPD- together affect more than half a million people in the West Midlands.

As the nearest salt cave was 75 miles away in Milton Keynes, we decided to open a local branch. We wanted residents of the West Midlands and surrounding areas to have the opportunity to use salt therapy and improve their quality of life.

Zoe Ness, who runs the Salt Cave with her partner David Hetherington, said: "It's been wonderful to watch Frances improving since she started having salt therapy.

To book a free halotherapy treatment, contact the Salt Cave on 01384 686777.

Trained staff help you find the best bed for your needs

Commercial feature

DREAMLAND now has its biggest-ever sale on, with nearly every bed in store heavily reduced.

Since 1976, Dreamland has been the home of luxury beds, bed frames and headboards, perfect for creating beautiful bedroom aesthetics.

Dreamland prides itself upon its choice, offering an extensive range of beds, mattresses and bedsteads with everything from wooden, upholstered or metal bed frames, from single to king, and even super-king sizes

Dreamland stocks only manufacturers that are approved by the National Bed Federation, and offers premium handmade beds, with mattresses filled with natural fillings such as wool, cashmere, alpaca and silk help to regulate your body temperature

Dreamland – the home of luxury beds, bed frames and headboards

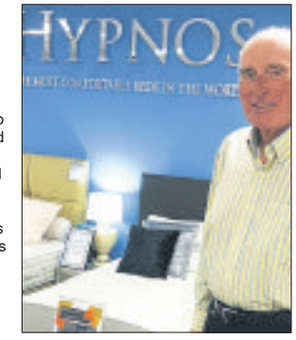
Experts

Everyone at Dreamland knows how difficult a decision purchasing a new bed can be, that's why the staff have extensive product training, making sure their product knowledge is second to none. Founded by Mike Brown, Dreamland is an independent family business that is proud to serve the Black Country and the wider Midlands region. Instead of a delivery charge, customers are asked to make a donation, all of which goes to charity.

Over the past few years, the store has raised more than £150,000 for the Mary Stevens Hospice, thanks to the generosity of customers. Dreamland will even collect your old bed and assemble your divan.

The staff are vigorously trained to make sure they can help find the bed to suit all your needs – leading Dreamland to have a 5-star rating from their customers. This is because Dreamland provides its customers with the best-suited bed for them at the most affordable price possible. Dreamland is open seven days a week and is minutes from the Merry Hill shopping centre, with a free customer car park.

Visit the Dreamland store at 23 Mill St, Brierley Hill, DY5 2RG, call 01384 74166 or visit the website at www.dreamlandbedding.co.uk



Mike with the Hypnos range

Stourbridge Chronicle

COLLECTION for 2018

An 8-page supplement showcasing a collection of businesses and organisations in the region with a reputation for excellence

The Spectacle Store, Brierley Hill. Dudley & Smethwick

Rydale Windows, Halesowen

Sofa Style Lye, Stourbridge

Dream Doors - Stourbridge

The Salt Cave, Merry Hill

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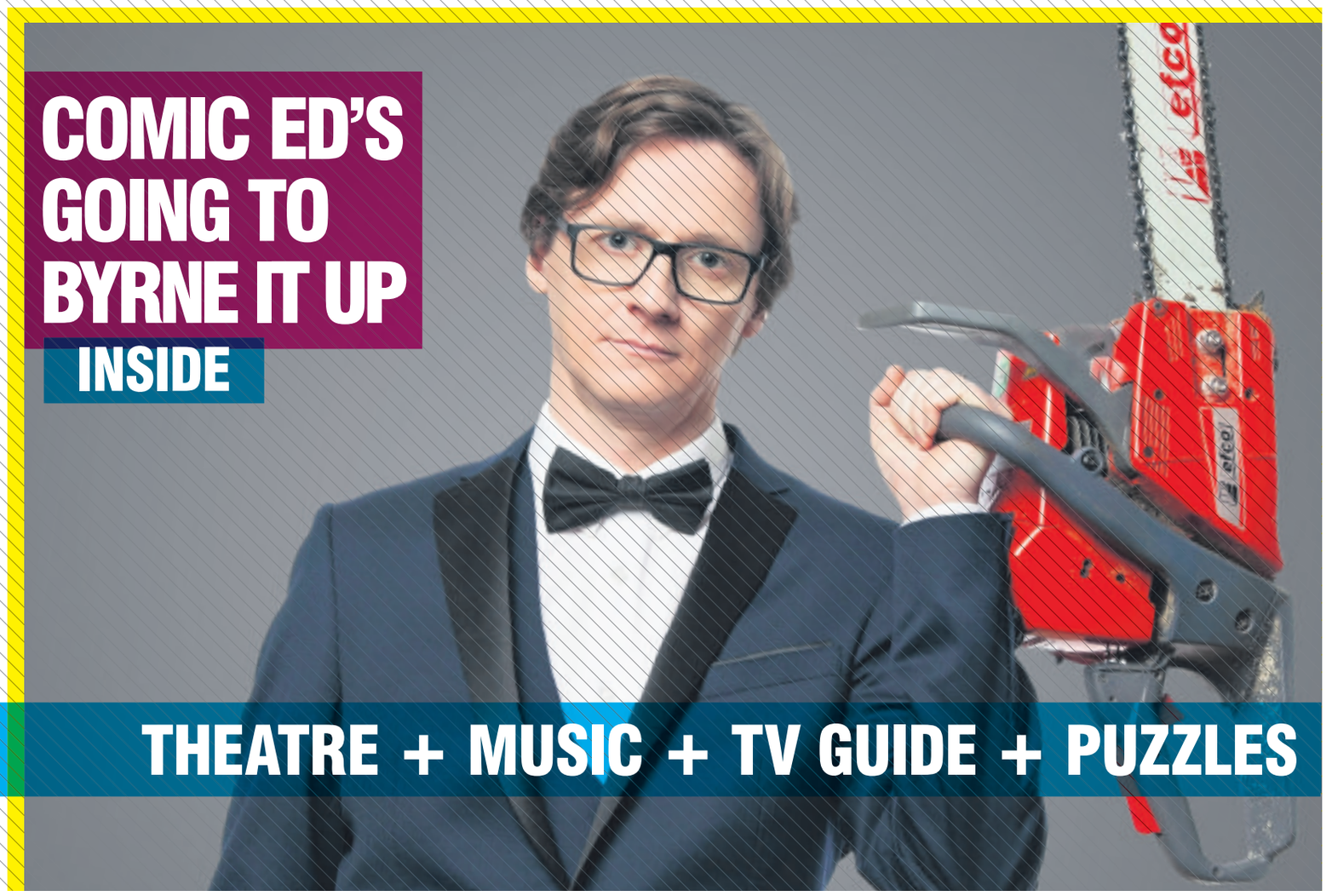

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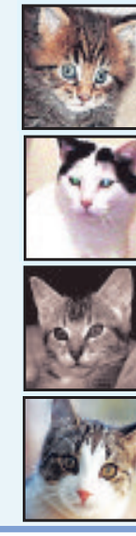

Time to get ready for Byrne's night

Stand-up star Ed Byrne is returning to the West Midlands with his new show, Spoiler Alert. He will headline Stafford Gatehouse tomorrow and Birmingham Town Hall on Saturday.

Ed is on the road after a total sell-out Edinburgh Fringe run with his biggest ever tour to date. He says: "I originally intended to call the show 'I'll Millennial You in a Minute', but my promoter considered the title 'off-puttingly baffling'."

In the show, Ed explores the thin line between righteous complaining and brat-like whining and asks, 'are we right to be fed up, or are we spoiled?'

Ed is recognised as one of the finest observational comics in the industry. His TV credits include Mock The Week, Have I Got News For You, The Graham Norton Show, Live At The Apollo, The One Show, Comic Relief Bake Off 2015, The World's Most Dangerous Roads and, most recently, he and Dara O Briain filmed the follow up to their Big Adventure show for BBC Two entitled Dara and Ed's Road to Mandalay.

He will return to the region to headline Lichfield's Garrick on April 24.

Ed has been an acclaimed stand-up (with audiences and critics alike) for 20 years. His success with shows such as the Roaring Forties, Different Class and the 1998 Perrier-nominated A Night At The Opera led to him appearing on the box in the diverse likes of Mock The Week, Father Ted, The One Show and All Star Mr & Mrs, while his love of hillwalking resulted in him writing a regular column for The Great Outdoors magazine.

NATURAL

In fact, his love of natural history has crossed into television with appearances on The One Show (abseiling in Snowdonia), Countryfile (climbing Sgùrr Dearg, the 'inaccessible pinnacle' on Skye) and presenting items on Volcano Live (BBC).

The Irish comic is firmly of a belief that the current breed of parents spoil their kids rotten whether it's to do with the ever-increasing size of garden trampolines, or his own kids' demand for elderflower cordial.

"My dad wasn't a bad dad, he was just a 1970s dad. If I could never see my children ever again from this moment on, I've already done more parenting then he did in my entire life. But, of course, I made a conscious decision that I was going to be an awesome dad. My wife will come back with tales from her friends of how awful their husbands are and she'll see me smiling and say 'alright, stop congratulating yourself just because such and such can't be left alone with their children for two minutes'."

In his new touring show, the perfectly-titled Spoiler Alert, Ed compares and contrasts the old-school child-rearing days with 21st century methods and suggests that there are different ways to learn how to be a mum or dad.

"I grew up in what I would call an aspirational household in that my parents bettered themselves over the course of my childhood. My mother was a radiographer and ended up a lecturer in radiography, while my dad was a sheet metal worker and went up to a supervisory role. I'd still say that you are expected to do a lot more parenting than our parents did and that's a weird thing because you tend to think that your parents are who you learnt parenting from. But you don't, really, it's more that you look around to see what's going on with other parents."

For the show, Ed extends his analysis on the culture of entitlement to look at areas where we could perhaps do with being spoiled a little bit more. "Where I think we're not acting spoiled enough is in the political arena. We have a tendency to accept what's happening and that's where we should be acting more entitled: we are literally entitled to the government we want. We're spoiled in all these little ways, but not spoiled enough."

As well as stories about his two young sons, Ed weaves in routines about running out of petrol in the most awkward place imaginable, helping rescue an injured man in the Cairngorms, and the nation-dividing campaign and result of the EU referendum. His way of tackling Brexit is to draw an analogy with the time his son was determined to touch an electric fence with his dad trying to warn him of the dangers.

Byrne out – Ed brings his latest tour to Stafford and Birmingham

"I was telling the story of the electric fence for a while, and then suddenly it struck me that it was Brexit in microcosm. I don't want to alienate half of the population or maybe a third of my audience, but it works as an analogy whichever side you're on. The government told you not to do this and that it would be a terrible idea, but you said 'no, we want to do it anyway'. So now we're doing it and it's proving a terrible idea. I do think it's a fair analogy, but no doubt for some it will come across as me being a typical liberal elite Remoaner."

Spoiler Alert also continues a theme that he's tackled in previous shows, that of his gradual shift from being a working-class Dubliner to a fully paid-up rural-residing member of the middle classes. Where once he would do routines slating 4x4 owners, he is now the proud(ish) owner of such a vehicle. And in the poster for his tour, he brandishes other signifiers of social mobility: a bowtie and chainsaw. "It's one of two I own: that one is the smaller of the two," Ed remarks of his chainsaw rather than his neckwear. "I use it for firewood, both for my wood burning stove and also for the barbecue. The first time I used one I was fine, though I think it worried my parents that I had bought a chainsaw." Having premiered Spoiler Alert at the Fringe and used the month of August to hone the show, Ed is happy. "Being on stage is enjoyable and this part of the writing process is enjoyable. The empty page though is a scary thing. On the first leg of the tour I'll do about an hour and 15 minutes, plus I'll have a support act. I keep a tour diary now of places where the curries are disappointing and where they are good and where audiences have been good before."

> *I keep a tour diary now of places where the curries are disappointing*

● **For more entertainment news and reviews see The Ticket in your Express & Star every Friday.**

Tips for the top The Amazons

We're delighted to now be headline act in Brum

THEY'RE starting their headline tour at Birmingham's Institute next Thursday, February 1.

And The Amazons couldn't be happier about that. Because in a former life and in a former band, they once played there as a blink-and-you'll-miss-them support act.

Frontman Matt Thomson and bandmates Elliot Briggs and Chris Alderton opened for The Mystery Jets back in 2012.

"That feels like a long time ago," says Matt, whose band enjoyed a top ten hit with their self-titled debut album in May.

"We landed a support slot with The Mystery Jets. It was us and Swim Deep on the bill. I only just caught up with the Mystery Jets at a Christmas party at the end of last year. I told them they were great to us when we were supporting them. We had a really good time. So to go back to that same venue, but as the headline act, is really important to us. It's going to be great."

The Amazons formed in 2014 in Reading and were snapped up by Fiction Records in 2015. They recorded their debut album in 2016 and released it in May. It went straight in at number eight, cementing their status as one of Britain's most exciting new bands.

By then they had been included in the BBC's Sound of 2017 and MTV's Brand New 2017 lists. They were also named a band to listen to in 2017 by NME, The Independent and BBC Radio 1. This is the year when they must deliver on that promise.

Jonn hopes his talk will be Atomic

Ned's Atomic Dustbin frontman Jonn Penney has been thinking about writing his autobiography.

He's 50, he's got a couple of kids – and he wants to write down his stories before he forgets them.

The only trouble is he doesn't know where to start. So he's planning a special appearance at Wolverhampton Literature Festival tomorrow (Saturday) at the city's Slade Rooms from 8.45pm. He'll be with Neds' guitarist Ratt – playing songs, telling stories and answering questions.

Jonn explains: "The thing is, I'm too damn lazy to do it myself. I'm also frightened at the prospect of writing enough words to make a book. And also, as has been said, I'm very much a reactionary person and I need a nudge. I sat down and started writing this book and I couldn't remember. So we thought we'd do something where people can prompt me – where the fans can ask questions and jog my memory – then I'll be able to do it.

"Once the fans get me started, they transport me back to my flat in Lye where I'm hungover and it's early in the morning and I've just written a few lyrics. I'm a waffler, so I just need encouragement to get me going.I'm not stupid enough to think there's a massive market out there for the memoirs of a singer from a lesser known indie band from England. But it's worth having it down somewhere."

Jonn has played a huge number of gigs during his career, headlining festival stages, playing sell out gigs at Wolves Civic Hall and featuring on Top of the Pops. He will be fronting the Neds again at a sold out 02 Academy in Birmingham at the Love From Stourbridge gig with The Wonder Stuff on April 14, the first of two consecutive nights at the venue.

Gaga is Joanne for Arena dates

Lady Gaga brings her Joanne world tour to Birmingham with gigs at the city centre Arena on Wednesday and at the Genting Arena the following night. Other key gigs include psychedelic rock at the Hare and Hounds in Kings Heath with Americans Wand on Monday and Moon Duo on Tuesday. Will Varley previews his Spirit of Minnie album at the 02 Institute on Tuesday, the same night Terry Bickers (House of Love/Levitation) teams up with Pete Fij at Newhampton Arts Centre, Wolverhampton.

Dance, romance and murder on stage

Dance dominates over the next few days with Strictly's Anton de Beke and Erin Boag in action at the Symphony Hall on Saturday with dancers, singer Lance Ellington and the London Concert Orchestra. Then the Russian State Ballet of Siberia make their annual visit to Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre to present The Nutcracker (Sunday, matinee), Romeo and Juliet (Monday) and Swan Lake (Tuesday). Meanwhile, murder swap thriller Strangers on a Train is at the New Alexandra Theatre (Monday-Saturday) with John Middleton (Emmerdale), Christopher Harper (Coronation Street) and Hannah Tointon (Mr Selfridge). Carole King musical Beautiful returns to Birmingham Hippodrome from Wednesday and the romantic Brief Encounter opens at Birmingham Rep on Friday, February 2.

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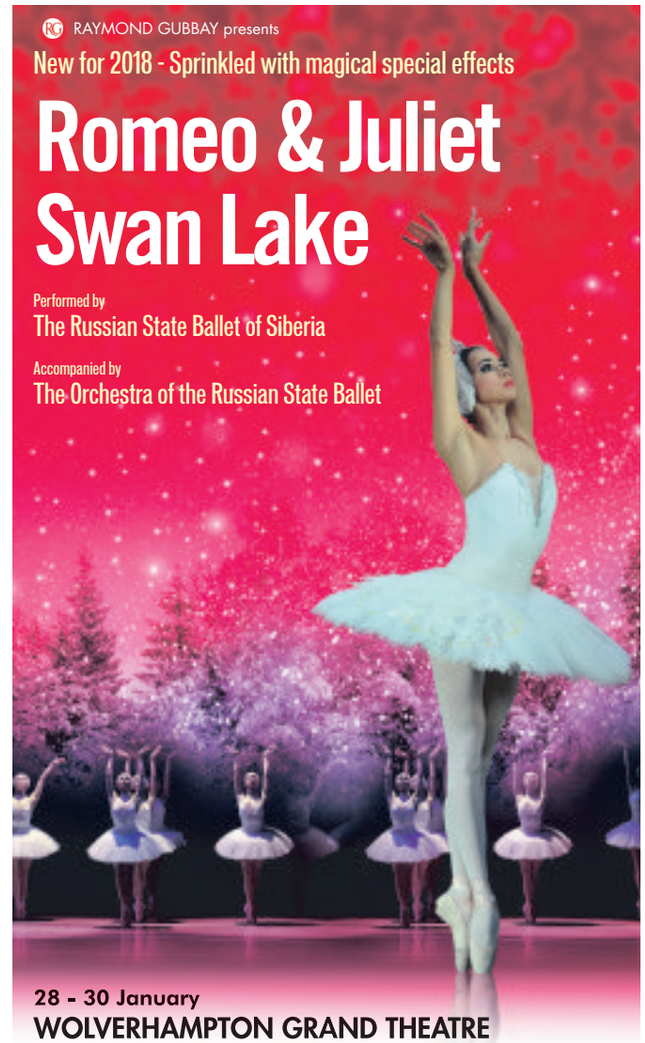

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SATURDAY'S TV JANUARY 27

CHOICE

Rob Beckett

All Together Now (BBC1, 7.15pm)

New series. Rob Beckett hosts the musical talent show with a twist, as a range of singers step on-stage for a chance to win a £50,000 cash prize. The judging panel takes the form of 'The 100', a large collective of music experts and performers from all over the UK led by Geri Horner. However, in this talent show, the key to success is encouraging the judges to sing along too, and the more panellists each singer manages to win over, the better their chances of proceeding to the grand final.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** Mary Berry Everyday. (R) **12.00** Football Focus. **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Tennis: Australian Open 2018. **2.30** Live Bowls: World Indoor Championships. Coverage of the open singles semi-finals. **4.30** Final Score. **5.25** BBC News. **5.35** Regional Programme. **5.40** And They're Off for Sport Relief.

6.25 Pointless Celebrities. Mark Steel, Marcus Brigstocke, Nicky Campbell, Rachel Burden, Liz Kershaw, DJ Nihal, Shaun Keaveny and Nemone take part in a radio-themed edition of the quiz.

7.15 All Together Now. New series. Rob Beckett hosts the musical talent show in which contestants must successfully encourage members of a 100-strong judging panel to sing along with them to win.

8.20 Casualty. Dylan struggles to keep his alcoholism under control, as staff on the ED deal with what is suspected to be a case of domestic abuse. Meanwhile, Ethan's first day as Clinical Lead fails to go according to plan, as he finds himself veering wildly from one disaster to another, and he starts to understand the real pressure of leading a team.

9.10 BBC News; Weather.

9.30 Hard Sun. Hicks uncovers the extent of Renko's investigation into the Alex Butler murder, and journalist Will Benedetti's connection to Hard Sun makes him the spree killer's next target. When Blackwood publicly announces that only Fr Dennis can stop him killing again, the priest is immediately cast as a figure of public hate, and London becomes a city under siege. With chaos unfolding all around, Grace gives Daniel some shocking information about his father. Pre-apocalyptic thriller, starring Agyness Deyn.

10.30 Match of the Day: FA Cup Highlights. Gary Lineker presents action from the fourth-round ties, including Newport County v Tottenham Hotspur at Rodney Parade and Liverpool v West Bromwich Albion at Anfield; National Lottery Update.

12.00 The NFL Show. **12.30 Film:** What Doesn't Kill You. (2008) **2.05** Weather for the Week Ahead. **2.10** BBC News.

BBC2

6.05 The Wonder of Animals. (R) **6.35** Naomi's Nightmares of Nature. **7.05** The Pets Factor. **7.30** Matilda and the Ramsay Bunch. **7.45** Matilda and the Ramsay Bunch. **8.00** The Dengineers. **8.30** Deadly Top 10. (R) **9.00** Robot Wars. (R) **10.00** Robot Wars. (R) **11.00** The Snow Wolf Family and Me. (R) **12.00** The Hairy Bikers' Mediterranean Adventure. (R) **1.00** A Vicar's Life. (R) **1.30 Film:** The Diary of Anne Frank. (1959) **4.15** Italy's Invisible Cities. (R) **5.15** Trust Me, I'm a Doctor. (R) **5.45** Tom Kerridge: Lose Weight for Good. (R)

6.15 Hugh's Wild West. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall investigates efforts to bring beavers back to the Dorset-Devon border, and a swan herd at Abbotsbury Swannery rounds up his charges for a health check.

7.15 A House Through Time. David Olusoga follows the story of the Liverpool house residents from 1891 to 1945, including a family of saddlers who lived there for four decades and a docker with a secret. (R)

8.15 Dad's Army. Mainwaring and the platoon dress as firemen to take part in an initiative exercise, but soon find themselves tackling a real fire. Comedy, starring Arthur Lowe and Clive Dunn. (R)

8.45 Grand Tours of Scotland's Lochs. Paul Murton travels into the secret heart of the Rough Bounds of Knoydart, by way of Loch nan Umbh, Loch Morar, Loch Nevis and Loch Arkaig.

9.15 QI XL. Josh Widdicombe, Stephen K Amos and Cally Beaton join regular panellist Alan Davies and host Sandi Toksvig in an extended edition of the unconventional quiz.

10.00 Darcey Bussell: Dance Beyond Boundaries. The former ballerina reveals how street dance group Boy Blue Entertainment and Canadian-based ice dancing collective Le Patin Libre are helping to revolutionise modern dance.

10.30 Film: Birdman: Or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance). (2014) Premiere. A faded movie star wrestles with a personal crisis as he tries to put on a disaster-afflicted Broadway play. Oscar-winning drama, with Michael Keaton and Edward Norton.

12.20 Bowls: World Indoor Championships Highlights. **1.20 Film:** Girl with a Pearl Earring. (2003) **2.55** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dana. (R) **6.50** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.05** Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister Six. **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.55** Scrambled!: Fangbone. (R) **8.10** Scrambled!: The Powerpuff Girls. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Be Cool, Scooby-Doo! (R) **9.05** Scrambled!: Wishfart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** James Martin's Saturday Morning. **11.25** The Hungry Sailors. (R) **12.25** Countrywise. (R) **12.55** ITV News; Weather. **1.00** Dancing on Ice. (R) **3.15** Catchphrase. (R) **4.00** Tipping Point. (R) **5.00** The Chase. (R)

6.00 Regional Programme; Weather.

6.05 ITV News; Weather.

6.20 New You've Been Framed! Harry Hill narrates another round of viewer-submitted comedy clips, including a hoverboard destroying an office, and a man falling through a casino ceiling.

6.45 Take Me Out. A warehouse worker from Wolverhampton and a musician from Leicester are among the men seeking the approval of Paddy McGuinness's panel of 30 single ladies.

8.00 The Voice UK. The fourth round of Blind Auditions arrives, as Emma Willis ushers another selection of would-be stars onto the stage to have their skills appraised. As ever, coaches Jennifer Hudson, Tom Jones, Will.i.am and Olly Murs are all seated with their backs to the contestants, meaning they must judge each performer's skill based solely on the power of their voice. Any of the would-be stars who are welcomed to join a coach's team will be in with a chance of ultimately claiming a record deal with Polydor.

9.30 Through the Keyhole. Stephen Mulhern, Louis Walsh and Rochelle Humes form the panel as Keith Lemon challenges them to guess the mystery owners of three more celebrity homes.

10.30 ITV News; Weather.

10.45 Film: Jaws: The Revenge. (1987) The remaining members of the Brody family are terrorised by a bloodthirsty great white shark in the Bahamas. Thriller sequel, starring Michael Caine, Lorraine Gary and Lance Guest.

12.15 Jackpot247. **3.00** Babushka. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.15 3rd Rock from the Sun. (R) **6.40** 3rd Rock from the Sun. (R) **7.05** The King of Queens. (R) **7.35** The King of Queens. (R) **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.25** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.55** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Frasier. (R) **10.00** Frasier. (R) **10.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.25** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.55** The Simpsons. (R) **12.25** The Simpsons. (R) **1.25** Come Dine with Me. (R) **2.25** Coast vs Country. (R) **3.25** A Place in the Sun. (R) **4.30** A Place in the Sun. (R) **5.30** The Secret Life of the Zoo. (R)

6.30 Channel 4 News.

7.00 Great Canal Journeys. Timothy West and Prunella Scales explore the Marne-Rhine Canal. Last in the series. (R)

8.00 Village of the Year. Archaeologist Alex Langlands, garden designer Juliet Sargeant and craft expert Patrick Grant are called on to decide which five villages from this week's heats should claim a place in the grand final. Plus, Penelope Keith hears more from the five contenders in the South East Zone.

9.00 Holocaust: The Revenge Plot. Documentary, making use of previously undisclosed recordings and candid interviews to tell the story of the Avengers, a secret organisation of Holocaust survivors who came up with a brutal plot in 1946 to seek vengeance on behalf of the six million Jews killed by Hitler and the Nazis. In the dying days of the Second World War, "warrior-poet" Abba Kovner came to the conclusion that the prosecution of a handful of Nazis would not amount to justice, and instead claimed only "an eye for an eye" could possibly redress the balance. With the help of a band of like-minded individuals, Kovner planned to murder six million Germans by infiltrating cities and poisoning water supplies. This film also showcases a clandestine recording, made in 1985 at the dying Kovner's request, that identifies all the leading conspirators and how they carried out their operations.

10.00 Film: The Monuments Men. (2014) Fact-based drama, directed by and starring George Clooney.

12.20 Film: Snake Eyes. (1998) **2.00** The Last Leg. (R) **2.55** Hollyoaks. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **10.10** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. **10.45** Funniest Fails, Falls & Flops. (R) **11.10** Police Interceptors. (R) **12.05** Police Interceptors. (R) **1.05** The A-Team. (R) **2.05** The A-Team. (R) **3.00** Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords. (R) **4.00** Nightmare Tenants, Slum Landlords. (R) **5.00** Rich House, Poor House. (R)

6.00 The Wonderful World of Puppies. The development of puppies' senses. The dalmatian litter has reached six weeks old. As a breed they are susceptible to deafness, so they are taken for to the vet for a crucial hearing test. A new litter of golden doodles reveal how puppy eyesight develops week by week, cameras track the progress of a springer spaniel as he begins training to become a mountain search-and-rescue dog, and the labrador puppies reach six weeks old – time to find out if they have the senses and skills to pass their guide dog test.

7.00 Greatest Ever Celebrity Wind Ups. Joe Pasquale revisits more celebrity pranks, including the time Justin Bieber's elaborate trick for Taylor Swift, and incognito meet-and-greets with Michael Buble and Mark Hamill.

8.00 Blind Date. Paul O'Grady plays matchmaker for a reformed "bad-boy" and a nightclub hostess, and past couples Jonathan and Kelly, and Joanna and David return to dish the dirt on their dates.

8.55 5 News Weekend.

9.05 Football on 5: The Championship. Colin Murray introduces highlights from the weekend's games, including Bristol City v Queens Park Rangers, and Ipswich Town v Wolverhampton Wanderers.

10.00 Celebrity Big Brother. Catching up with the celebrities as they react to Friday night's double eviction, revealing how the departure of two housemates has affected the remaining contestants.

11.05 The X-Files. Mulder and Scully uncover a medical laboratory where extreme genetic experimentation has been going on for decades, breeding subjects who possess unexpected and dangerous powers. (R)

12.00 Britain's Greatest Bridges. **12.10** SuperCasino. **3.10 Film:** Enemies Closer. (2013) **4.30** Access. **4.45** House Doctor. (R) **5.10** Wildlife SOS. (R) **5.35** House Busters. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four

7.00 Children of the Holocaust **8.00** Surviving the Holocaust – Freddie Knoller's War **9.00** Spiral **10.55** Top of the Pops: 1985 **12.05** The Easybeats to AC/DC: The Story of Aussie Rock **1.05** New York Rock at the BBC **2.05** Joy of the Guitar Riff **3.05** Close

ITV2

11.30 Take Me Out **12.45** You've Been Framed! Gold **1.10 Film:** St Trinian's 2: The Legend of Fritton's Gold (2009) **2.10** FYI Daily **2.15 Film:** St Trinian's 2: The Legend of Fritton's Gold (2009) **3.25 Film:** The Flintstones (1994) **4.25** FYI Daily **4.30 Film:** The Flintstones (1994) **5.10 Film:** The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003) **6.15** FYI Daily **6.20 Film:** The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (2003) **9.00 Film:** Fast & Furious 5 (2011) **10.00** FYI Daily **10.05 Film:** Fast & Furious 5 (2011) **11.35** Family Guy **12.35** American Dad! **1.35** Ibiza Weekender **2.30** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **2.55** Teleshopping **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3

1.50 Rosemary & Thyme **2.55 Film:** Columbo: Sex and the Married Detective (1989) **4.55** Midsomer Murders **11.00** Foyle's War **1.00** On the Buses **2.00** ITV3 Nightscreen **2.30** Teleshopping

ITV4

1.30 ITV Racing: Live from Cheltenham. Coverage of Festival Trials Day. **4.00 Film:** Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986) **5.00** FYI Daily **5.05 Film:** Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986) **6.05** Storage Wars **7.00** Darts: The Masters Live. Coverage of day two from Milton Keynes. **11.00 Film:** Assault on Precinct 13 (2005) **12.05** FYI Daily **12.10 Film:** Assault on Precinct 13 (2005) **1.10** Car Crash Global: Caught on Camera **2.10** The Protectors **2.40** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4

11.40 Film: Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Squeakquel (2009) **1.30 Film:** Toy Story That Time Forgot (2014) **2.00** The Goldbergs **4.30** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** The Inbetweeners Movie (2011) **11.00** Gogglebox **12.00** Naked Attraction **1.10** Rude Tube **2.15** Gogglebox **3.10** Naked Attraction **4.05** The Goldbergs **4.30** How I Met Your Mother **5.15** Rude(ish) Tube

Film4

11.00 Courage Mountain (1990) **1.00** Stuart Little 2 (2002) **2.35** Patton (1970) **5.50** Avatar (2009) **9.00** Exodus: Gods and Kings (2014) **11.55** The Midnight Meat Train (2008) **2.00** Series 7: The Contenders (2001) **3.55** Close

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SUNDAY'S TV JANUARY 28

CHOICE

Brenda Blethyn

Vera
(ITV, 8pm)
The dead body of a teenage boy is found in a reservoir near a remote rural timber community. Vera and her team investigate, and discover that the boy had already been missing for three days prior to his death. However, the case is complicated by an apparent conspiracy of silence, as many of the townsfolk refuse to cooperate with the police investigation. A complex web of relationships between the victim's friends and family slowly emerges, with many dark secrets that could have driven someone to kill. Brenda Blethyn, Kenny Doughty, Jon Morrison and Kingsley Ben-Adir star.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.30** Match of the Day: FA Cup Highlights. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** The Big Questions. **11.00** Regional Programme. **12.15** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15** Money for Nothing. (R) **2.00** Songs of Praise. **2.35** Big Cats. (R) **3.35** Match of the Day Live: The FA Cup. Cardiff City v Manchester City (Kick-off 4.00pm).
6.05 BBC News.
6.20 Regional Programme.
6.30 Countryfile. Matt Baker visits a sheep farm in Crieff run by two brothers who are preparing to follow in the footsteps of their father and sister by joining the British Olympic curling team. Charlotte Smith goes in search of the perfect trees to make cakers for the Highland Games, Adam Henson discovers how the local climate gives Cornish sheep farmers an advantage, and Tom Heap reports on the culling of mountain hares in the Scottish Highlands.
7.30 Still Open All Hours. Granville tries to stop Madge from moving away and taking Mavis with her – but there is only one person who can change their minds, and he has been dead for years.
8.00 Call the Midwife. Lucille is on duty when a friend of Valerie's goes into labour – but when the patient's health deteriorates, the new recruit is accused of incompetence by her racist mother.
9.00 McMafia. Alex fears his family are under threat when Vadim learns the truth about him – but his paranoia about a surveillance operation drives a wedge between him and Rebecca.
10.00 BBC News.
10.20 Regional Programme.
10.30 Match of the Day: FA Cup Highlights. Action from the latest fourth-round ties – Norwich City or Chelsea v Newcastle United and Cardiff City v Manchester City.
11.05 The Women's Football Show. A look at the biggest issues in the women's game, focusing on matters at both club and international level.
11.40 Teenage Knife Wars. Jermaine Jenas investigates the spike in knife crime that is devastating young lives. (R)
12.10 Weather for the Week Ahead.
12.15 BBC News.

BBC2

6.00 A to Z of TV Gardening. (R) **6.20** The Instant Gardener. (R) **7.05** Gardeners' World. (R) **7.35** Monty Don's Paradise Gardens. (R) **8.35** Countryfile. (R) **9.30** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.00** Food & Drink. (R) **11.30** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **12.00** Nature's Perfect Partners: Natural World. (R) **1.00** Tennis: Australian Open 2018. **2.30** Live Bowls: World Indoor Championships. **5.15** Ski Sunday.
6.00 Britain's Cycling Superheroes: The Price of Success. The controversy surrounding Britain's international cyclists. (R)
7.00 Yellowstone: The Toughest Spring. Cameras follow as winter turns to spring in Yellowstone during 2016, capturing the re-emergence of a range of animals, who leave their winter dens to explore the new, green world. (R)
8.00 Dragons' Den. More entrepreneurs present their money-making ideas to the panellists, including pitches for natural raw dog food, a date-based smoothie and a free-running exercise regime.
9.00 Chris Packham: In Search of the Lost Girl. The naturalist goes in search of a member of a nomadic tribe in Sumatra whom he photographed 20 years previously, and discovers the impact of deforestation on the country.
10.00 The Mash Report. Nish Kumar and a cast of comedy correspondents present the satirical and surreal take on the week's news. (R)
10.30 Insert Name Here. Tom Davis, Kate Williams, Robert Peston and Aisling Bea join captains Richard Osman and Josh Widdicombe to answer Sue Perkins' questions about famous namesakes. (R)
11.00 Cleverman. New series. Koen comes back to life stronger than ever, a mysterious stranger comes to the aid of his surviving followers and Slade begins carrying out experiments on the Hairies.
11.55 Film: Norfolk. (2015) Premiere. A mercenary leads an idyllic life with his son, until the day when a mysterious stranger pushes him into one last mission. Drama, with Denis Menochet.
1.15 Sign Zone: Question Time. (R) **2.15** Holby City. (R) **3.15** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Sooty. **6.10** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.20** Bottom Knocker Street. (R) **6.35** Dino Dana. (R) **6.50** Super 4. (R) **7.00** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.05** Marvel Ultimate Spider-Man vs The Sinister Six. **7.30** Scrambled!: Scrambled! **7.35** Scrambled!: The Tom and Jerry Show. (R) **7.55** Scrambled!: Ben 10. **8.10** Scrambled!: Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.30** Scrambled!: Spy School. **9.05** Scrambled!: Wishfart. (R) **9.25** ITV News. **9.30** River Monsters. (R) **10.00** Peston on Sunday. **11.00** The Martin Lewis Money Show. (R) **11.30** The Voice UK. (R) **12.55** ITV News; Weather. **1.10** Britain's Brightest Family. (R) **1.40** The Cruise: Return to the Mediterranean. (R) **2.10 Film:** You've Got Mail. (1998) Romantic comedy, starring Tom Hanks and Meg Ryan. **4.30** Regional Programme ; Weather.**4.40** ITV News; Weather. **5.00** The Chase: Celebrity Special. (R)
6.00 Dancing on Ice. Phillip Schofield and Holly Willoughby present the skating challenge, with the 10 remaining contestants and their professional partners performing to impress the judges and avoid elimination.
8.00 Vera. A teenage boy is found dead in a reservoir near a remote rural town. Vera takes on the case, and uncovers a web of fractured relationships within the community. Last in the series.
10.00 ITV News; Weather.
10.15 Peston on Sunday. Political magazine, presented by Robert Peston, with Allegra Stratton. (R)
11.10 Next of Kin. Mona returns to the UK from Karachi and, despite her injuries, is determined to investigate her nephew Danny's suspected links to radical Islamic terrorists. But on the day of her brother Kareem's funeral, the GP's efforts to get Danny to safety have unexpectedly dire consequences for the family. Thriller about a doctor who is drawn into a tangle of betrayal, conspiracy and murder after her brother's kidnapping brings buried family secrets to light, starring Archie Panjabi, Jack Davenport, Claire Skinner and Viveik Kalra. (R)
12.05 Great Art. Tim Marlow explores the life and work of Rembrandt. (R) **1.00** Jackpot247. Interactive gaming. **3.00** Sunday Night at the Palladium. (R) **3.50** ITV Nightscreen. Text-based information service. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. Guests air their differences. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.05 Kirstie's Fill Your House for Free. (R) **6.20** The King of Queens. (R) **6.45** The King of Queens. (R) **7.10** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Frasier. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** Jamie and Jimmy's Friday Night Feast. (R) **1.30** Jamie's Quick & Easy Food. (R) **2.00** The Simpsons. (R) **2.30** The Simpsons. (R) **2.55** The Simpsons. (R) **3.25 Film:** Garfield: A Tale of Two Kitties. (2006) Family comedy, with the voice of Bill Murray. **4.55 Film:** How to Train Your Dragon. (2010) Animated fantasy, with the voice of Jay Baruchel.
6.40 Channel 4 News.
7.00 Posh Pawn. James test drives an Austin A35 van and meets 1980s pop star Leee John, who is hoping to sell a collection of jewellery he believes is worth £40,000. Claudia visits the Manchester store to appraise some designer bags.
8.00 The Biggest Little Railway in the World. The track approaches Inverness, but has to cross the 60-metre Aberchalder Viaduct first. Dick suggests switching the steam engine with an electric one, to the outrage of the purists on the team. An ingenious solution is developed to cross a flight of steps on the approach to the city. In the forests surrounding Loch Ness, the track laying team's spirits are flagging and Molly considers quitting the project.
9.00 SAS: Who Dares Wins. The remaining recruits are challenged to dive backwards and blindfolded into a reservoir from a gangplank 10 metres up, before moving on to the most psychologically demanding stage of training – resisting interrogation. A simulated capture puts the friendship between two of the group to the test, as they are pushed towards betraying one another.
10.00 8 Out of 10 Cats Does Countdown. Jimmy Carr hosts the comical words-and-numbers quiz, with Alan Carr and Josh Widdicombe taking on Joe Wilkinson and Sara Pascoe. Bill Bailey helps out in Dictionary Corner. (R)
11.00 Film: Side Effects. (2013) Thriller, starring Jude Law.
1.00 Holocaust: The Revenge Plot. (R) **1.55** The Supervet. (R) **2.50** Coast vs Country. (R) **3.45** KOTV Boxing Weekly. **4.10** Coast vs Country. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Little Princess. **6.10** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **6.20** Poppy Cat. (R) **6.35** Wissper. (R) **6.40** Milkshake! Monkey. (R) **6.45** Milkshake! Bopping About. (R) **6.50** Simon. (R) **6.55** Peppa Pig. (R) **7.05** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.15** Thomas & Friends. (R) **7.25** Fireman Sam. (R) **7.40** Olly the Little White Van. (R) **7.45** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.10** Paw Patrol. (R) **8.25** Nella the Princess Knight. **8.40** Noddy: Toyland Detective. (R) **9.00** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **9.15** Shimmer and Shine. (R) **9.30** Digby Dragon. (R) **9.45** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. **10.20** Football on 5: The Championship. (R) **11.15** Police Interceptors. (R) **12.15** Police Interceptors. (R) **1.15 Film:** Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves. (1991) Action adventure, starring Kevin Costner. **4.15 Film:** A Cinderella Story. (2004) **5.20** 5 News Update. **5.25 Film:** A Cinderella Story. (2004) Concluded.
6.00 Film: Johnny English Reborn. (2011) A bumbling former secret agent is lured out of seclusion to foil an attempt to assassinate the premier of China. Spy comedy sequel, starring Rowan Atkinson and Gillian Anderson.
8.00 Billionaire Kids: Diamond Lives. Documentary about the luxurious lives of children from wealthy families, as well as the companies able to make a profit by catering to the youngsters' every whim.
8.55 5 News Weekend.
9.00 Celebrity Big Brother. With two housemates evicted on Friday night, the remaining celebrities embark on their final week, knowing only one of them can be crowned winner on Friday night.
10.05 Film: The Boy Next Door. (2015) Premiere. A newly single teacher's flirtation with a handsome teenager living next door begins to spiral out of control. Thriller, starring Jennifer Lopez and Ryan Guzman.
11.35 Film: Her Last Will. (2016) Premiere. A conwoman hatches a plan to drive an old woman insane to allow her children to inherit the family fortune. Thriller, starring Rya Kihlstedt and Patrick Fischler.
1.15 SuperCasino. **3.10** Celebrity 100 Per Cent Hotter: The BIG Challenge. (R) **4.00** Britain's Greatest Bridges. (R) **4.45** House Doctor. (R) **5.10** Great Artists. (R) **5.35** House Busters. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Four
7.00 Only Connect **7.30** University Challenge **8.00** The Coffee Trail with Simon Reeve **9.00** Timeshift: The Men Who Built the Liners **10.00** Machines **11.05** BBC Proms 2017 **12.35** Classic Soul at the BBC **1.35** Art, Passion & Power: The Story of the Royal Collection **2.35** Timeshift: The Men Who Built the Liners **3.05** Close

ITV2
11.35 Take Me Out **12.55** The Voice UK **2.20 Film:** Yogi Bear (2010) **3.20** FYI Daily **3.25 Film:** Yogi Bear (2010) **3.55 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **5.10** FYI Daily **5.15 Film:** Mr Bean's Holiday (2007) **5.45 Film:** The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012) **6.45** FYI Daily **6.50 Film:** The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey (2012) **9.00** Ibiza Weekender **10.00** Family Guy **11.30** American Dad! **12.25** The Cleveland Show **1.15** Release the Hounds **2.10** Totally Bonkers Guinness World Records **2.25** Teleshopping **5.55** ITV2 Nightscreen

ITV3
11.55 Lewis **1.55** Foyle's War **6.00** Agatha Christie's Marple **8.00** Paul O'Grady: For the Love of Dogs **9.00** Tonight at the London Palladium **10.00** Birds of a Feather **11.05 Film:** Evil Under the Sun (1982) **1.20** Blue Murder **2.40** Rosemary & Thyme **3.55** Road to Avonlea **5.35** ITV3 Nightscreen

ITV4
12.45 Darts: The Masters Live. Coverage of day three from Milton Keynes. **5.00** Storage Wars **6.00** Pawn Stars **7.00** Darts: The Masters Live. Further coverage of day three from Milton Keynes. **10.30 Film:** Harry Brown (2009) **11.30** FYI Daily **11.35 Film:** Harry Brown (2009) **12.35** Minder **2.35** Football's Greatest: Thierry Henry **2.40** ITV4 Nightscreen **3.00** Teleshopping

E4
1.00 Film: Toy Story OF TERROR! (2013) **1.30** The Goldbergs **3.30** The Big Bang Theory **8.00 Film:** The Chronicles of Narnia: The Voyage of the Dawn Treader (2010) **10.15** The Big Bang Theory **11.15** Gogglebox **1.20** Rude Tube **2.20** First Dates **3.15** First Dates Abroad

Film4
11.00 The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951) **1.00** Cheaper By the Dozen 2 (2005) **2.50** Dunston Checks In (1996) **4.30** Journey to the Center of the Earth (1959) **7.05** The Cold Light of Day (2012) **9.00** The Wolf of Wall Street (2013) **12.30** Red State (2011) **2.10** A Better Life (2011) **4.00** Close

FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
The Town, Channel 5, 12.05am
A thief takes a bank manager hostage while he and his gang make their getaway, only to later learn she lives in the same neighbourhood as him. As FBI agents close in, he tries to befriend her to make sure she cannot identify him, but as he falls in love with her, he considers changing his ways - risking the fury of his unstable partner in crime. Drama, directed by and starring Ben Affleck. With Rebecca Hall and Jeremy Renner. (2010)

TUESDAY
The Wrong Nanny, Channel 5, 3.15pm
Premiere. Stella hires a nanny to take care of her twin boys, only to find out the woman she hired is her daughter that she gave up for adoption. Thriller, starring Madison Adams. (2017)

WEDNESDAY
The Stranger Inside, Channel 5, 3.20pm
Premiere. A woman and her husband who are trying to have a baby become the target of their fertility doctor. Thriller, starring Sofia Milos. (2016)

The Town, Monday, Channel 5, 12.05am

THURSDAY
Escaping Dad, Channel 5, 3.15pm
A woman goes on the run with her children to escape an abusive husband. But he is the District Attorney and uses his legal connections to put out an amber alert on his missing family. Thriller, starring Sunny Mabrey, Jason Wiles, Grace Van Dien and Rick Overton. (2017)

FRIDAY
My Daughter Is Innocent, Channel 5, 3.15pm
Two teenage girls are accused of a brutal murder and one mother is determined to prove her daughter's innocence. However, all may not be as it seems. Thriller, starring Victoria Pratt. (2017)

Calvary, BBC2, 11.05pm
A priest tries to put his community's affairs in order as he waits for a meeting with a man who has vowed to kill him. Drama, starring Brendan Gleeson, Chris O'Dowd, Kelly Reilly, Aidan Gillen and Dylan Moran. (2014)

PICK OF THE WEEK

Matilda looks to connect the dots in thrilling new series

Sometimes, the scariest dramas aren't the goriest or the ones that make you jump, but the subtle stories that rely on mood and a slowly building sense of disquiet that creeps up on you.

That's what writer Kris Mrksa is aiming to do with his new six-part series Requiem, which is partly inspired by such classic psychological horrors as The Innocents, Rosemary's Baby and Don't Look Now.

Or as actress Lydia Wilson, who plays the main character Matilda Gray, puts it when asked what drew her to the role: "What I really liked was the fact that it was a psychological drama, but in a sneaky way. Matilda is a girl from London in Converse trainers, whose life suddenly spirals into this giant mystery.

"Requiem starts off with the banality of everyday London, and then it suddenly goes, 'Woah!'"

Although she may dress like an ordinary twentysomething, the first episode makes it clear that there is something unusual about Matilda – she's a successful cellist. In fact, she about to head off to New York to begin a concert tour when her mother Janice (Joanna Scanlon) takes her own life.

As far as Matilda is concerned, there were no hints that her mum was suicidal. To make sense of the tragedy, she goes through a box that was on Janice's bed, and finds it contains items relating to Carys Howell, a young girl who went missing from a small Welsh village more than 20 years ago.

In a bid to discover if there's a link between her mother's death and the toddler's disappearance, Matilda and her loyal accompanist Hal (Joel Fry) set off for Penllynith.

Lydia can understand why Matilda needs to get to the bottom of Janice's suicide. "That's the key relationship in the whole drama. Like a lot of single-parent families, they're friends, as well as a mother and a daughter. Matilda is filled with grief about Janice's suicide.

"She is now at a crossroads in her life. She can either fall apart or she could channel her sadness into an obsessive search for her true identity. That's a much more bearable way of dealing with her grief."

However, it seems Matilda may not be only one grieving as she arrives in Penllynith on the day that the funeral of Ewan Dean, a wealthy local landowner who died in mysterious circumstances, is being held.

Ewan's Australian nephew Nick (James Frecheville), who has inherited the estate, invites the musicians to stay at Dean House, which Matilda recognises from a photo in a mother's box. But could there be another reason why the property seems so familiar – and increasingly sinister?

Lydia suspects viewers will want to keep tuning into Requiem, which will be shown internationally by Netflix, to find out. "I hope audiences will fall in love with this world and want to keep coming back to it. I hope they will feel like we did when we made it – intrigued by this strange thing that doesn't look like anything else."

Lydia Wilson stars in Requiem, Friday, BBC1, 9pm

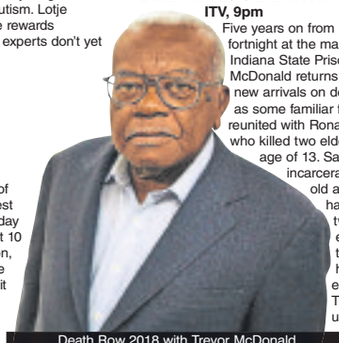
BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY
Winterwatch 2018
BBC2, 9pm
The team returns to the National Trust's Sherborne Park Estate in the heart of the Cotswold countryside, and although this is the third consecutive season they have spent here, the familiar surroundings still hold many surprises. Michaela Strachan and Chris Packham are based at the cosy barn on the estate, bringing updates from the remote cameras rigged throughout Gloucestershire, and Martin Hughes-Games continues his investigations into some of the harder-to-find animal characters, including trout, lesser horseshoe bats, red kites and skylarks. Meanwhile, Gillian Burke is on the road once more, coming live from the island of Islay just off the west coast of Scotland. This is a special place in the winter - it's unique position in relation to the jetstream makes it a haven for all kinds of wildlife, including otters and golden eagles.

TUESDAY
Can You Rebuild My Brain?
Channel 4, 10pm
When Lotje Sodderland was 34, her brain was permanently damaged by a stroke that almost killed her. It fundamentally changed her and how she saw the world but it also left her fascinated with the science that saved her life. Cameras follow Lotje as meets neuroscience pioneers - scientists who are using the latest knowledge to repair 'broken' brains and developing ground-breaking treatments for everything from Parkinson's and Alzheimer's to autism. Lotje examines the risks as well as the rewards associated with fixing something experts don't yet fully understand.

WEDNESDAY
The Truth About Getting Fit
BBC1, 8pm
Michael Mosley and a team of scientists investigate the some of the easiest and most effective ways to get the biggest benefits of exercise. In Sheffield, the team test whether walking 10,000 steps a day is more effective than doing short 10 minute brisk walks, and in London, Michael installs a bike in an office to test whether workers can get fit by doing just two minutes of intense exercise a week. Elsewhere in the programme, Michael also joins strength experts in Glasgow to do a 6 week experiment, comparing the effects of heavy and light weights for building muscle.

THURSDAY
Death Row 2018 with Trevor McDonald
ITV, 9pm
Five years on from his harrowing fortnight at the maximum-security Indiana State Prison, Sir Trevor McDonald returns to meet the new arrivals on death row as well as some familiar faces. He is reunited with Ronald Sanford, who killed two elderly women at the age of 13. Sanford was incarcerated at 15 years old and although he has spent the last two decades educating himself, the reality is that he will most likely end his life here. The prisoner opens up about the disturbing childhood that, he claims, made him able to commit such heinous acts. However, another inmate, the remorseless William Clyde Gibson, from South Indiana, who was sentenced to death in June 2014 for killing and mutilating three women, disagrees. 'Everybody thinks when you do the type of stuff I did, people automatically think it's because you had a bad childhood,' he says. 'I had a perfectly normal childhood.'


Death Row 2018 with Trevor McDonald, Thursday, ITV, 9pm

FRIDAY
Nigel Slater's Middle East
BBC2, 9pm
Some countries seem to attract more celebrity chefs on culinary adventures than other – Italy has definitely played host to more than its fair share of TV cooks. But in this new series, Nigel Slater is going off the beaten track as he tours the Middle East, which is home to some of the oldest and grandest cuisines in the world. His journey begins in the Lebanon, where he learns how the country's dishes are influenced by its position on the Mediterranean. As he travels from Beirut to the Beqaa Valley, close to the Syrian border, eating with local families and home cooks, he learns more about the people's resilience in the face of decades of war, and how that it is reflected in their pride in their culture and cuisine.

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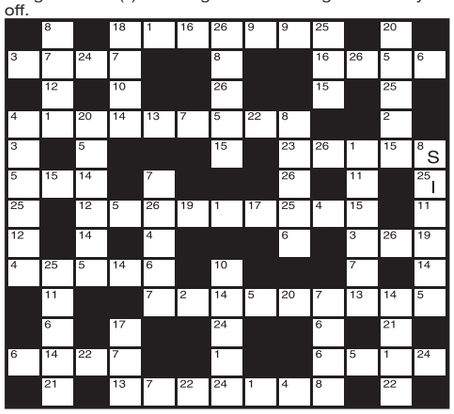
BRAIN GYM

No.464

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.



1	14
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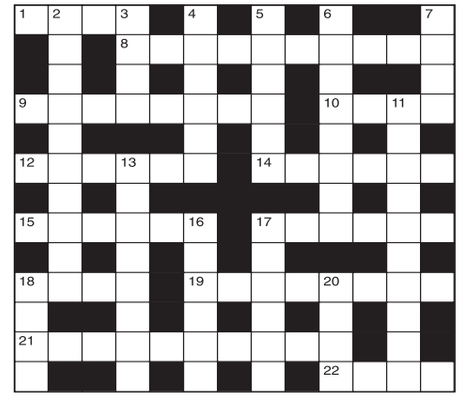
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
C	M	G	R	Y	Q	V	O	K	S	J	A	I
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
P	T	X	E	N	Z	F	U	L	H	W	D	B

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.



Cryptic Clues:

Across

1. Creatures put in a trap, escaped (4)
8. Official note in which half the comments can't be matched (10)
9. Is apprehensive about the plumage (8)
10. A number of letters for a job (4)
12. The light touch of an oarsman (6)
14. Trim the Christmas tree (6)
15. The medicine-man hides the pictures (6)
17. Valuing scrap metal inside (6)
18. Insect with reversed barb (4)
19. It's cheap to supply a literary pot-pourri (8)
21. Set and convert into a cotton field (10)
22. After this the board will make a piece of furniture (4)

Down

2. Footman needs a trip for a change (10)
3. A little science to upset the Caledonian (4)
4. Current measure makes mother return to father in Paris! (6)
5. Maledictions producing sure confusion in the Civil Service (6)
6. To cause depression I'd upset the alcohol (8)
7. The others don't work (4)
11. It will take only a minute to go all round this kind of shop (6-4)
13. Never too disturbed to produce a harmonic (8)
16. Seem to be an equal, we hear (6)
17. Rough woodwork for the yokel (6)
18. Substitutes stop in front of these (4)
20. Places providing refreshment in opposite directions (4)

Quick Clues:

Across

1. Pitch (4)
8. Volcanic tremor (10)
9. Sham (8)
10. Yawn (4)
12. Set fire to (6)
14. Golf club (6)
15. Cherish (6)
17. Beer-maker (6)
18. Russian ruler (4)
19. Contemplate (8)
21. Frustrate (10)
22. So be it (4)

Down

2. Scandalous (10)
3. Despatched (4)
4. Fruit (6)
5. Protect (6)
6. Bog (8)
7. Measure (4)
11. Priority (10)
13. Gap (8)
16. Formula (6)
17. Brigand (6)
18. Neat (4)
20. Jot (4)

Sudoku

				4			1	
2		9	7	5			3	
		4			1	9		2
9				1	7			4
	7	1				6	2	
5				6				3
		2	3				4	
	4				8	3		5
	5			9	4			

Fill in the grid above so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

3	1	2	7	8	6	4	5	9
8	4	6	9	3	5	1	7	2
7	9	5	2	4	1	3	8	6
4	3	1	6	7	8	9	2	5
6	8	9	3	5	2	7	1	4
2	5	7	4	1	9	6	3	8
5	2	3	1	9	4	8	6	7
1	6	4	8	2	7	5	9	3
9	7	8	5	6	3	2	4	1

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS:
CRYPTIC - Across: 7 Omega; 8 Outcast; 9 Bring to; 10 An end; 12 Essentials; 15 At half-mast; 18 Keats; 19 Tellers; 21 Fortune; 22 Serve.
Down: 1 Double talk; 2 Remit; 3 Gang; 4 Morose; 5 Atlantis; 6 Cameras; 11 Distressed; 13 Sells out; 14 Theatre; 16 Matter; 17 Heart; 20 Lose. QUICK - Across: 7 Barge; 8 Observe; 9 Exploit; 10 Alter; 12 Disrespect; 15 Omniscient; 18 Still; 19 Fervour; 21 Cleaner; 22 Round.
Down: 1 Obsequious; 2 Erupt; 3 Zero; 4 Porter; 5 Assassin; 6 Written; 11 Retrograde; 13 Insolent; 14 Infidel; 16 Inform; 17 Vogue; 20 Rare.

Quiz

1. What is the name of the sequel to Milton's Paradise Lost?
2. Which avant-garde New York rock group featured Lou Reed and John Cale?
3. Whose vice-president was Richard Nixon?
4. Of which group of islands is Espiritu Santo the largest?
5. What position would we call that of the Taoiseach?
6. Which British tennis player won the 1994 Korean Open?
7. By what name do we know the spider Latrodectus mactans?
8. Who is the current UK Poet Laureate?
9. Which former Bishop of London has become a Roman Catholic priest?
10. In which African country is Abuja?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Old Vic; 2 Karl Marx; 3 John Dos Passos; 4 Dorchester; 5 JRR Tolkein; 6 Nereids or nereides; 7 Honey-bee poison; 8 Pontius Pilate; 9 Textured vegetable protein; 10 1975.

Niner: FILAMENTS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

967178 gives a fuel,
531168 gives a type of fuel,
4629 gives a power.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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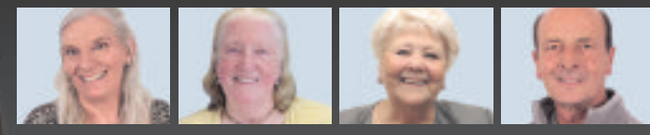

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Allo, allo! Finer taste of France

STOURBRIDGE High Street can be a pleasant place to wander around on any given day.

On a Friday, it's particularly lively, with plenty of independent shops, restaurants and bars offering the perfect place to take the weight off, meet up with friends and family – or even to start the Friday night fun a bit early.

One place that really stands out is the French Connection Bistro, and I was lucky enough to try the place out with my wife, Kelly, while enjoying my birthday. We don't tend to venture into Stourbridge that often and it's even more rare we get to spend the afternoon together while our three-year-old daughter, Annabelle, is at nursery.

But the opportunity of enjoying some lovely French food was too good to miss – so the cinema idea was binned in favour for some top grub and fine wine.

Tasty – tuck in at The French Connection

Plenty of choice in selection of starters

RUSTIC

Pretty much everyone has tried French cuisine at some point in their lives, but I was a French restaurant virgin. One thing I can say, however, is entering French Connection is like being teleported from the hustle, bustle of a busy Black Country town, into a rustic, homely and cosy restaurant sat in the middle of a village in France.

I had visions of how it might look and it was exactly what I'd hoped for – quiet, quaint, well laid out, plenty of space and the right amount of privacy. There was also some nice French background music too.

Each meal is individually prepared using ingredients that have usually been freshly delivered each day. The chef has more than 22 years experience and all the food is served straight from the pan to your plate.

The menu, as you'd expect, was wide ranging. Some of it was very reasonable while other options were pretty pricey, which is what you'd expect when ordering something like lobster.

There was also a lunchtime menu too, which changes according to the season and the availability of ingredients. Any food intolerance or allergy issues can also be catered for if staff are informed before placing an order. As it was a lunchtime meal and we didn't fancy anything too heavy, we opted for the three courses for £14.95 – served noon to 2.30pm – which was a very reasonable for what we got.

An example of the food on offer included homemade vegetable soup with French bread and butter, French coarse pork pate served with toasted baguette and salad garnish, mushroom ravioli with mushroom sauce and Parmesan, and smoked salmon mousse with prawn salad (for an extra £1) – and they were just the starters.

The mains were equally as impressive and included the likes of salmon fillet with coarse grain mustard sauce served with poached egg and crushed potatoes, beef stuffed peppers, and butterbean and cheese bake in a Filo pastry dish.

There was also a 'fish of the day' option, which happened to be homemade fisherman's pie topped with potatoes and served vegetables.

The desserts, like the starters and mains, change regularly so what you get can be a bit of a lottery. But if ours were anything to go by, it's a lottery you cannot lose.

We shared a bottle of Riviera which, without pretending to be connoisseurs, was possibly the nicest merlot we had ever tasted.It was a great start to a birthday weekend.

JAMES FISHER

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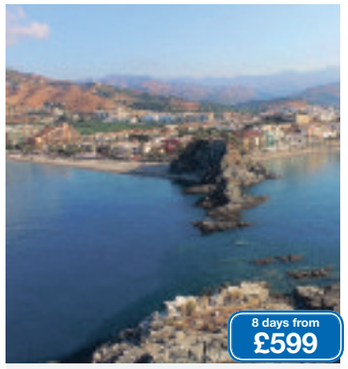
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EVENT PRICE £10,295

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Transmission: Manual
Fuel: Petrol
Mileage: 2,487 miles
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Transmission: Automatic
Fuel: Petrol
Mileage: 5,343 miles
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2014 Honda CR-V 2.2 i-DTEC EX
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Col: Alabaster Silver Metallic
Transmission: Manual
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Amount of Credit	£1,500.00	Amount of Credit	£4,891.00
23 Monthly Payments of	£62.50	58 Monthly Payments of	£99.00
Final Payment inc Option Fee	£62.50	Final Payment inc Option Fee	£109.00
Total Amount Payable	£10,990.00	Total Amount Payable	£6,049.00
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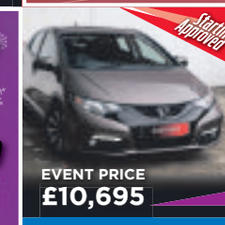

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You would find it difficult to match local Suzuki dealers, Clarks of Kidderminster and Halesowen Motor House, when it comes to personal service, quality vehicles, customer loyalty and overall customer satisfaction.

Their parent company, Worcester Carsales, was first founded by Mr Derrick Grieveson in Worcester in 1953. In 1973 his son, Stuart Grieveson, joined the family-owned company, and today, he is managing director. All of Mr Derrick Grieveson's grandchildren also work within the group.

Exceptional

Happy staff means contented customers, and the fact that Halesowen Motor House and Clarks of Kidderminster have always enjoyed high levels of repeat business is evidence of this. This desirable situation is due to its customers being provided with exceptional levels of service across all departments, from new and used car sales through to parts and aftersales.

The retailers' extensive fleet of new and quality used vehicles means there's always huge choice and value available to meet every customer's requirement and budget.

There is also an excellent service department at both sites, providing outstanding aftersales service which ensures loyal customers keep coming back time and time again.

Suzuki trained technicians will carry out a service using Suzuki genuine parts that come with a minimum 12 month warranty.

Clarks of Kidderminster

Halesowen Motor House and Clarks of Kidderminster have competitive service rates, to keep your Suzuki vehicle running smoothly and efficiently. You can take out a service plan from as little as £12.99 a month.

The Motability Scheme is available at both Halesowen Motor House and Clarks of Kidderminster, where customers can benefit from on hand, fully trained, Suzuki Motability specialists. They will guide applicants effortlessly through the scheme, taking care of all the paperwork and helping to find a car that best suits the customer's requirements. Many people aren't sure whether they qualify for Motability, but it is available to people with a wide range of physical or cognitive disabilities who receive the advanced rate of the Personal Independence Payment (PIP) or the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA). If you're not sure whether you or a loved one qualify, then our friendly Motability Specialists will be happy to check for you.

Halesowen Motor House

The Motability Scheme has many great components including a new car every three years with a mileage allowance of 60,000. Breakdown recovery, servicing and maintenance, road tax and insurance for two drivers is all included (you can nominate a friend or family member if you don't drive yourself).

It really is a fantastic scheme but unfortunately many eligible people aren't aware of it or aren't sure if they qualify, so please get in touch with one of the friendly specialists if you have any questions. Both Halesowen Motor House and Clarks of Kidderminster have easy parking or can arrange home visits.

The Suzuki range itself is currently available to retail customers with 0% finance and no deposit (excluding Jimny), so now has never been a better time to check out these fantastic, award-winning cars.

So go along to Halesowen Motor House or Clarks of Kidderminster and experience a test drive for yourself, you won't be disappointed!

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Halesowen Motor House
Dudley Road, Halesowen, West Midlands, B63 3NH, **0121 503 0001**
cars.suzuki.co.uk/dealers/halesowen-motor-house

Models shown: Ignis 1.2 Adventure petrol manual including metallic paint (£465) available at £14,464 on the road. Swift 1.0 Boosterjet HYBRID SZ5 petrol manual including optional accessory pack (£479) and metallic paint (£485) available at £16,463 on the road. Vitara 1.6 Kuro petrol manual including metallic paint (£500) available at £19,249 on the road. Official fuel consumption figures in mpg (L/100km): Ignis range: Urban from 51.3 (5.5) to 57.6 (4.9), Extra Urban from 64.2 (4.4) to 70.6 (4.0), Combined from 60.1 (4.7) to 65.7 (4.3). Official CO_2 emissions from 106g/km to 97g/km. Swift range: Urban from 44.1 (6.4) to 58.8 (4.8), Extra Urban from 65.7 (4.3) to 76.3 (3.7), Combined from 56.5 (5.0) to 65.7 (4.3). Official CO_2 emissions from 114g/km to 97g/km. Vitara range: Urban from 42.1 (6.7) to 61.4 (4.6), extra urban from 55.4 (5.1) to 76.3 (3.7), combined from 49.5 (5.7) to 70.6 (4.0). Official CO_2 emissions from 131g/km to 106g/km. from 114g/km to 97g/km.
Fuel consumption figures are based on an EU test for comparative purposes only and may not reflect real driving results. ***Excludes Suzuki Jimny.** Hire Purchase product available on 0% APR over 12-42 months. Personal Contract Purchase product available on 0% APR over 25-43 months. Offer is available from participating Authorised Suzuki Dealers only. Offer cannot be used in conjunction with any other offer unless otherwise stated. Credit is available to UK residents aged 18 years or over, subject to status, from Suzuki Finance, a trading style of Suzuki Financial Services Ltd, St. William House, Tresillian Terrace, Cardiff CF10 5BH. This offer is subject to availability and Suzuki Financial Services Ltd reserves the right to withdraw or amend this offer without notice or prior warning. Terms and Conditions apply. Suzuki Financial Services Ltd, part of Lloyds Banking Group. Offer correct at the time of going to print.

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what's on

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3 Home & Services

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4 Pets & Animals

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Guns & Dogs

NOTICE TO ADVERTISERS
Advertisers must ensure that they meet all necessary legal requirements for owning and using guns.

Pets Corner

NOTICE TO READERS
Please be aware that when purchasing a puppy there are some simple guidelines you can follow to ensure that you are not purchasing from a Puppy Farmer:
1. Try to ensure you visit the puppy whilst it is still with it's Mother.
2. Do not arrange to collect a puppy from any other location than that of the breeder.
3. Ensure that you are given any KC documentation, if pedigree.
Whilst Midland News Association publications take great care to avoid publication of advertisements from Puppy Farmers we cannot accept any liability should readers purchase from this kind of establishment.

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5 Business & Farming

Business Opportunities

READERS are recommended to take appropriate professional advice before entering into any obligations.

6 Property

Accommodation To Let

NOTICE TO READERS
Readers are advised to seek independent legal advice before entering into any financial commitments/contracts.

NOTICE TO READERS
It is an offence under the Accommodation Agencies Act 1953, for an Agency to charge a fee simply for the registration of your requirements and/or supplying particulars of premises to let.

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7 Jobs

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8 Motoring

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07791 113080.

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FORD FOCUS ESTATE
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£300.
07414 995878.

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£1,699 ono
07879 403302.

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FIAT 500 POP
09 plate
Two careful lady owners, FSH low mileage 26,000, white, four new tyres, MoT June, excellent condition.
£2,950.
01902 700758 or 07866 873207.

KIA SPORTAGE
2008, auto, diesel, black, MoT, fsh, electric windows, air bag, a/c, central locking, CD. One lady owner. 71,000 miles. Excellent condition.
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07968 082255.

PRESTIGE

MERCEDES E350 CDi SE AUTO COUPE
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Engine needs attention.
Hence price £4,950 ono.
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Cars Over £1500

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9 Local Information

Public Notices

LEGAL / PUBLIC NOTICES
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(remember to include a name/contact number for confirmation of receipt)

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Pursuant to the Trustee Act 1925 any persons having a claim against or an interest in the Estate of the aforementioned deceased, late of High Lodge Care Home Off Roman Road Iverley Stourbridge DY8 3JY formerly of 204 Shenstone Avenue Norton Stourbridge West Midlands DY8 3DY, who died on 23/12/2017, are required to send particulars thereof in writing to the undersigned Solicitors on or before 03/04/2018, after which date the Estate will be distributed having regard only to claims and interests of which they have had notice.
TALBOTS LAW LTD
Morgan House 25-27 Hagley Road
Stourbridge DY8 1QH
TS20579

10 Personals

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in the Express & Star and online

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Lots of love and kisses from your devoted Big Micky.
X X X

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Simply place your message at bookanad@expressandstar.co.uk using discount code V100 or fill in the coupon below and send it to: Valentine's Day Messages, Classified Advertising Department, Express & Star, Queen Street, Wolverhampton WV1 1ES. Or you can call into any of our branch offices or e-mail: marie.hogg@expressandstar.co.uk

Write your Valentine's message here starting with first name or nickname.
(One word per box in block capitals)

Why not add an illustration (as above right) for only £4.99? (tick appropriate box below)

SENDER'S DETAILS
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Contact No:
Email:

IMPORTANT
If you have selected an illustrated message, please enclose a cheque for £4.99, made payable to M.N.A, and send to the address above.

Express & Star 01902 317 878 bookanad.expressandstar.co.uk

Wayne Thomas with some of the children enrolled on his Ace Academy sessions

Thomas puts children through their paces

Martin O'Connor will lead the Ace Academy experience course

Youngsters at Ace Academy enjoy the coaching sessions

Sessions are run at venues across Walsall

Former Saddler nurtures Ace new football talent

SPORTING FEATURE

By Joseph Masi

"We now have lots of different age categories and that really helps the players develop."

A FOOTBALL academy launched by ex-Walsall midfielder Wayne Thomas is inviting youngsters to lace up their boots to kick off the new year.

Ace Academy runs coaching sessions for youngsters aged between two-and-half and 11 at various locations across Walsall.

Launched two years ago, 120 young footballers currently attend each week where they enjoy taking part in technical training sessions as well as playing games.

Children between the ages of two-and-a-half and four can receive a social introduction to football by joining Mini-Aces.

Youngsters aged from five to seven are invited to play with the Little Aces while juniors aged seven plus can team up with the Ace Academy.

Delighted

Alongside the coaching sessions, Ace Academy also runs futsal groups for children aged between seven and 14 while next season they expect to have seven teams playing grassroots football in the Walsall Junior Youth League.

And Thomas, aged 39, he is delighted with how the academy is progressing.

"I launched Ace Academy back in 2016 to try and bridge the gap between grassroots football and academy football," said the former Saddler, who played 18 games for the club over a four-year period.

"Since then it's grown a lot quicker than I expected and we now run nine different sessions each week for children of all different ages.

Midfielder Wayne Thomas as a Walsall player

"The aim is to try and cater for everyone," Thomas added. "Children aged from two-and-a-half can join the Mini-Aces which is full of fun games and gives them an introduction into football. But it's more a social thing for them.

"The majority of our kids enrol on an Ace Academy experience course which sees them attend a training session once a week. They then play games against professional academies.

"We have just agreed that former Walsall midfielder Martin O'Connor, who is a UEFA A Licence coach, will help head that up in the new year.

"And next season we also plan to extend our grassroots arm.

"We currently have an under-7s team. But we have plans to have seven teams of different age groups competing in the Walsall Junior Youth League.

"Ace actually stands for attitude, confidence and enjoyment. And that's what it's all about, to give these children a chance to enjoy their football and have fun."

Thomas, who also works as commercial manager at his former club Walsall, revealed he decided to start the academy after his eldest two sons were released from professional clubs.

"I've got four boys and one of them was released aged 12 and the other was released aged eight." he continued.

"I felt there was a lack of quality coaching in the area and I wanted to do something about bridging that gap between grassroots football and academy football.

"Academy football at professional football clubs isn't for everyone. It can come with a lot of pressure, both for the players themselves and for their families.

"And sometimes it might be better for a young footballer to join an academy when they are a little bit older, rather when they are seven or eight years old.

"Since we started in 2016, we have had five lads leave Ace to join academies at professional clubs. But we have also had a lot of lads turn those clubs down because they are enjoying developing with us."

Develop

Thomas believes one of the big benefits of Ace Academy is the number of youngsters now on board.

"I coach four evenings a week and absolutely love it, as do all the coaches," he added. "What's nice is that we now have lots of different age categories and that really helps the players develop,

"If we have got a three-and-a-half-year-old who technically or physically is developing faster than his peers, we can then put him with the under-fives.

"And it's the same if we have an older player, say a six-year-old, who is a bit shy. He can play with the under-fives to help build his confidence.

"The important thing is they all enjoy it and and all succeed and thankfully we have got the environment to ensure they can."

For more information on Ace Academy and for times and venues of their coaching sessions visit https://www.facebook.com/footballaceacademy/

Title bouts added to Gavin fight bill

TWO IBO continental titles will be on the line on the undercard of Frankie Gavin's IBO welterweight world title shot in his home city next month.

Top of the BCB Promotions bill on February 23 at Birmingham's Genting Arena is Gavin against Bethuel Ushona for the IBO Welterweight crown.

Redditch's Andrew Robinson, a former WBO European and British title challenger, takes on Birmingham's Craig Cunningham for the vacant middleweight crown. Meanwhile, former Midland champion Craig Morris of Ludlow will make the first defence of his strap against Leek's Andy Keates.

Undefeated Wolverhampton bantamweight Kyle Williams challenges Jordan Turner for the Midlands area title.

The undercard also features Birmingham's Matt Sen against Wolverhampton's Joshua Burke at cruiserweight, Tipton light heavyweight Ricky Summers, Birmingham super bantamweight Sean Davis, Birmingham super welterweight Mussab Abubaker, West Bromwich light heavyweight Tom Stokes and Coventry's Dilly Singh.

Laura goes for Muir indoor track success

DOUBLE European Indoor champion and five-time British record holder Laura Muir will compete in the 3000m at the SPAR British Athletics Indoor Championships in Birmingham next month.

Muir, aged 24, will look to claim her first British title over the distance on February 17, having already clinched two titles at 1500m and one at 800m. She will also be looking to secure her spot on the British team for March's IAAF World Indoor Championships at the same Arena Birmingham venue.

Fellow Scots Eilish McColgan and Steph Twell have also accepted their invitations for the event. British Athletics' Major Event Director Cherry Alexander said: "We're delighted to be hosting the SPAR British Athletics Indoor Championships and world trials in Birmingham. With two places up for grabs per event on the British team ahead of the World Indoor Championships competition will be fierce."

The championships are on February 17 and 18 with tickets on sale at www.theticketfactory.com or by calling 0844 3388222.

School lauded for its commitment to sport

A SCHOOL has been praised for its commitment to physical activity with a Youth Sport Trust Silver Quality Mark.

The Quality Mark, awarded to Ormiston Forge Academy Cradley Heath, is an online self-review tool which provides schools with a nationally recognised badge of excellence for the quality of its PE and school sport.

Dawn Benson, leader of the performance faculty, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to have been awarded the Silver Quality Mark from the Youth Sport Trust, which recognises our commitment to delivering the best possible sporting experiences for the young people at our school."

The Youth Sport Trust is a national charity that builds a brighter future for young people through the power of sport. Youth Sports Trust chief executive Alison Oliver said: "Congratulations to Ormiston Forge Academy for achieving the Youth Sport Trust Silver Quality Mark."

Students represent the academy in a number of sports and are also representing Sandwell at the Black Country Championships in badminton.

Sport

Just Ace! Former Saddlers player nurtures new talent
Page 39

On oche for darts FA Cup qualifiers

RILEYS Wolverhampton will stage the first of two events this weekend offering places at the PDC's 'FA Cup of darts'.

Pub chain Rileys Sports Bars are again working alongside the PDC to produce 32 'wildcards' to join the latter's professionals at the UK Open in Minehead, broadcast on ITV4 from March 2-4.

Four will prevail from two tournaments at Rileys Wolverhampton, on Broad Street, with two to be generated from the first competition on Saturday.

Entrants will be whittled down to four semi-finalists, with the two winners taking the UK Open places. The second event is on Sunday February 18.

Anybody aged 16 or over (on January 1) can compete in the qualifiers, but cannot enter on the day. The online cut-off is 48 hours before the event at www.rileys.co.uk/tournaments.

Applications can be made in person at Rileys until 5pm the previous day. Call 01902 310521. Entry is £7. Dress code is strictly trousers, shoes and either a shirt or polo shirt. Those whose played in last weekend's PDC's Qualifying School, or PDPA members, cannot enter.

Doors open at 10am and players must sign in by midday, ahead of the 12.30pm draw. They will toe the oche by 1.30pm.

Operating under the 501 format, ties are first to four legs until a best-of-nine semi-final.

The rest of the 128-field will be made up of the top 96 from the UK Open Order of Merit, played between the PDC pro at the organisation's own UK Open qualifiers.

Chess club makes it to semi-finals of Terrill Trophy

THE week started badly for Stourbridge Chess Club when a miscommunication meant the Wolverhampton division 2 'B' team only took five players to Rushall for a six board match. It didn't matter as a full strength Rushall won 4½ - 1½. Eric Horwill, Richard Wilkinson and Colin Woodall each got a draw.

The club was busy on Wednesday hosting two matches. In the Worcestershire County division 2 match against Kidderminster, Julie Wilson, Ron Evans, Eric Horwill and Richard Wilkinson all got draws with Jeremy Humphries winning on board 5 to give Stourbridge the match 3-2, keeping Stourbridge at the top

The other match on Wednesday was the Birmingham League Terrill Trophy quarter-final between Stourbridge's division 2 team and Sutton Coldfield of division 2. With no handicap involved the match would be decided on board count and board elimination in case of a 3-3 draw. Stourbridge won 4-2 to make the semi-finals.

Anyone interested in joining should contact Dave Scriven on 01384 423642 or visit www.stourbridgechess.f9.co.uk

School leads way with sporting success

THE new year has kicked off with rewards for sporting prowess at Stourbridge school Old Swinford Hospital.

Year 13 student Charles Hilliard has been invited to compete in the 200m at the British Indoor Athletics Championships next month. The best of British athletes will compete for a place on the national team ahead of the IAAF World Indoor Championships in March.

Hilliard will also compete in the 60m at the Midland Indoor Championships (u-20) and the 400m at English Age Group Championships (u-20) in Sheffield. A member of Halesowen Athletics Club, the 18-year-old has proved his ability many times over the years and is one of OSH's star athletes. At last year's sports day he broke one of the school's longest standing records in the senior 200m, in a time of 22.166s.

Adam Finch

Charles Hilliard

Huw Taylor

Cricketer Adam Finch is currently representing England in the under-19 Cricket World Cup in New Zealand. He took 2-10 in victory over Canada, their third Group C win. Adam, aged 17, and from Kingswinford, plays for Worcestershire CC 2nd XI and Himley CC.

On the rugby pitch, former OSH 1st XV captain and Worcester Warriors forward Huw Taylor will join the Dragons next summer on a two-year deal. Huw can play in the second row and back row and impressed the Newport side with consistent performances for Worcester Warriors. The 21-year-old has national honours having played for England at u-17s, u-18s and u-20s level. He is also eligible to play for Wales.

STOURBRIDGE COME UNSTUCK

Chester 24 Stourbridge 12

GIVEN the atrocious weather and a heavy, muddy surface, this was never going to be a try fest but the home side played the conditions far better then Stour.

The 80-mile journey took longer than expected and matters were not helped when first choice centre Rob Connelly pulled his hamstring just 15 minutes before kick off.

George Morgan was on hand to step in but his hasty warm up was still in progress as the rest of his team mates ran out on to the pitch.

The rain had stopped but it immediately became clear that the game would be punctuated by errors.

Crashed

With 12 minutes gone, Chester had the lead, Alick Croft crashed over and James Robins converted. The scoreboard was left untroubled until Nick David touched down for Stour, but the conversion was missed.

Second half pressure for Chester told when James Preston touched down to make it 12-5 with 53 minutes gone. Nine minutes later Matt Van Sertima (formerly of Wharfedale, Caldy and Sale) added five more points over in the left corner. The left hand upright thwarted Robins' kick.

Stourbridge did not give up and Jack Lea was unlucky not to score before a penalty try on 72 minutes made the score 17-12.

Stourbridge were one score away from an unlikely victory but this had also left them with a possible consolation bonus point. Two minutes from time, replacement Alex Reed scored for Chester and Robins converted.

Stour are now fourth in the league but still have a chance of promotion with nine games left.

Stourbridge full back Nick David crosses for their first try

Competitive season looks on the cards

WEEK 2 of the WCB Indoor Cricket League North division brought together the four new clubs in the Kinver league; all making promising starts to suggest a competitive season ahead.

In the first match, Chaddesley Corbett (104-3) beat Quatt (103-5) in the final over.

Quatt got off to a flying start but after opener Whelton retired on 26 the run rate dropped. Alex Biddle was run out on 21 but returned to the crease to end on 40 not out.

In reply, Chaddesley started positively but after losing two wickets a collapse looked on the cards. But Shan batted well and Quatt conceded 29 wides.

Match two saw Stourbridge (109-4) beat Coombs Wood (92-3) by 18 runs. Steve Ludlam made 25 for Stourbridge and J Nazir 21. For Coombs Wood, Dan Jones raced to 25and when opener A Saeed retired the scoring dropped.

M Patel took 3-11 and even the return of Jones, to end on 30no, was unable to stem the tide.

Young guns check in with the Heathens

TWO talented teenagers have been snapped up Cradley Heathens to ride in their National Trophy campaign.

Jason Edwards and Drew Kemp, both aged 15, join big-hitter Adam Roynon as confirmed starters.

Despite preparing for his first full season in the sport, Edwards has already made one guest appearance for Cradley.

He scored six paid seven in the final home meeting of 2017 against Eastbourne, the club he will ride for in this year's National League, and won his first ever race at Monmore Green. Edwards also competed in last year's F.A.S.T Golden Hammer, scoring an impressive ten points.

Drew Kemp

Edwards

Kemp, meanwhile is being tipped for big things. He will ride for Mildenhall in the National League and Heathens co-promoter Gary Patchett thanked them for allowing the deal to be done.

"We have a lot of options for the team but we wanted to have one of the talented youngsters at reserve and Drew fits the bill," Patchett said.

Of Edwards, Patchett said: "He's a very talented young rider and one that, had we been able to take a place in the League this season, we'd like to think would've been interested in a team place with the Heathens."

Shaw fire back to beat battling Yeltz

Shaw Lane 3 Halesowen 2

HALESOWEN led 2-1 at the break but were foiled by two goals in five minutes late on in this Evo-Stik Premier clash.

Third-placed Lane took the lead on just five minutes when Spencer Harris was handed a free header. But Enokh Ekongo equalised on 38 minutes and four minutes later Jordan Goddard gave Yeltz the lead.

It could have been three on 53 minutes when Kevin Monterio slid the ball wide. It proved pivotal as Nicky Walker equalised on 73 minutes. And on 77 minutes a corner was not held by Daniel Platt and ended up in the net.

★★★

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